

No 41

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# WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE  
STORY

## WEEKLY.

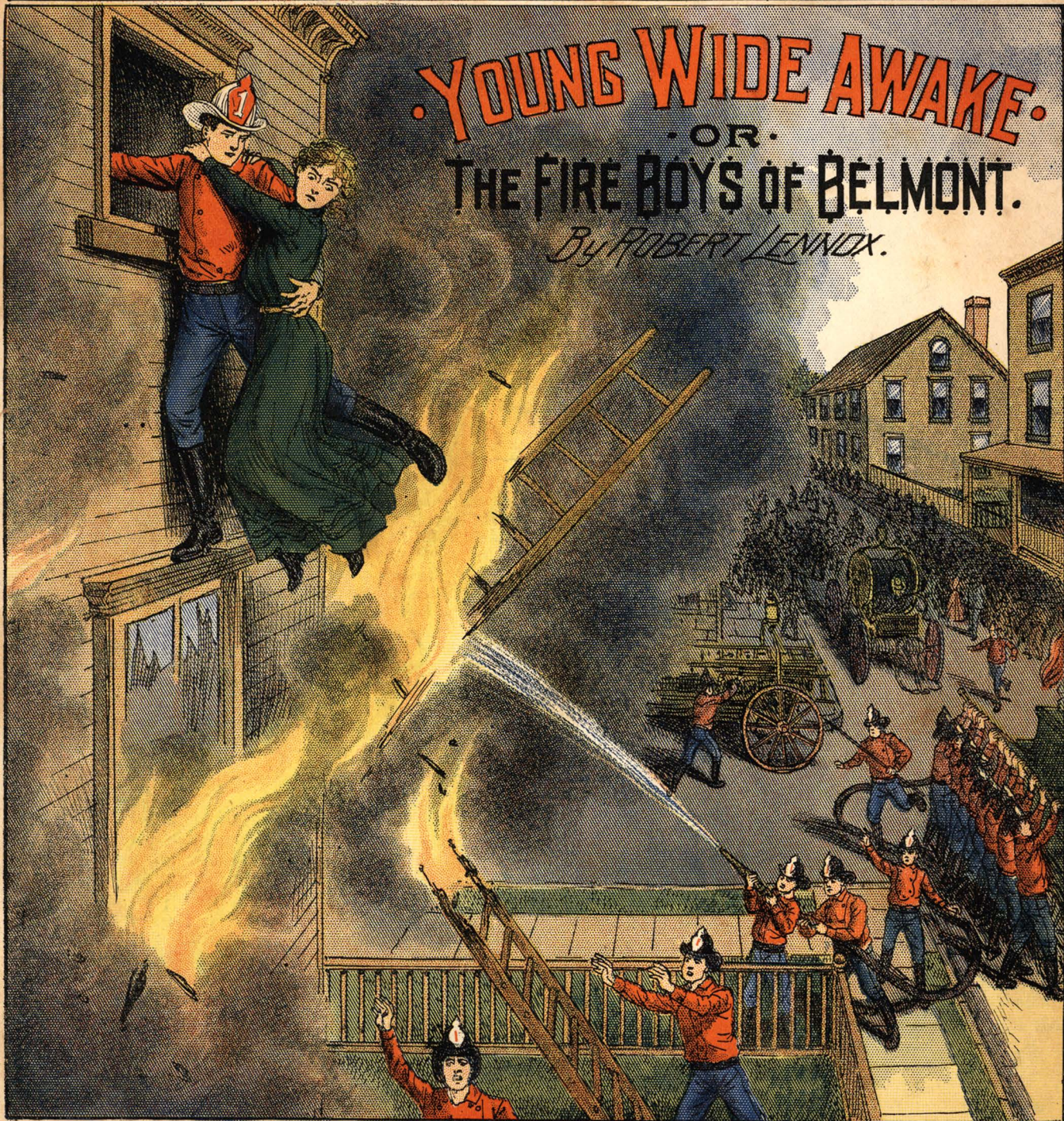
EVERY  
WEEK.

### YOUNG WIDE AWAKE.

OR.

### THE FIRE BOYS OF BELMONT.

By ROBERT LENNOX.



As the burning ladder broke, and Young Wide Awake's mighty effort swung Kitty to safety on the window ledge, both gazed shudderingly at the sheet of flame below. "We can't escape now!" gasped the girl. "We must and will!" Young Wide Awake staunchly retorted.



# WIDE AWAKE WEEKLY

**A COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK.**

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## Young Wide Awake

OR,

### THE FIRE BOYS OF BELMONT

By ROBERT LENNOX

#### CAST OF CHARACTERS.

**DICK HALSTEAD.**—"Young Wide Awake," 17 years old, a good all-around young athlete. Dark-brown hair, frank blue eyes. A good-looking boy and a bit fastidious about his appearance. Captain of the boys' fire company.

**JOE DARRELL,** 18.—One of Young Wide Awake's friends; a great sprinter. He is also a crack boxer, and is hot-headed enough to be in frequent need of this accomplishment.

**TERRY ROURKE.**—Young Wide Awake's chum. Irish, and with "sun-kissed" hair; 16 years old. A stocky bit of a lad, always aching for a scrap when the cause is a good one.

**HAL NORTON,** 17.—Blond-haired, and with blue eyes; one of the thoughtful boys and a bit of a dreamer. Lieutenant of Young Wide Awake's fire company.

**TED LESTER.**—14 years old and slight of build. The youngest of the boy firemen.

**SAM BANGS.**—Generally called "Slam Bangs" on account of his clumsy, blundering propensities; 16 years old, and always hungry. A staunch friend of Dick.

**GEORGE PARSONS.**—Middle-aged man. Has a monopoly of the local fire insurance business.

**FRED PARSONS,** 18.—Tall, slender and very dudish. He is Dick's rival for Kitty Lester, and an all-around thorn in Young Wide Awake's side.

**JAMES PELTON.**—Big, broad, black-whiskered, middle-aged man. Local chief of the fire department.

**HUGH DAVIS.**—Man of thirty-five. Captain of Torrent No. 1, the men's fire company.

**ELLIS THORNTON.**—Mayor of Belmont.

**JASON SHARP.**—Middle-aged and with bristly gray mustache and grizzled hair. Belmont's chief of police, and a policeman all the way through.

**KITTY LESTER.**—Young Wide Awake's sweetheart; 17 years old, of good figure, black hair and snapping dark-brown eyes. Is the daughter of wealthy parents.

**FAITH VANE,** 16.—Short, plump, blue-eyed, and having light-brown hair. She has a rich sense of the humorous, and is very partial to Terry. She is Kitty's most intimate friend.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### WHERE THE HONORS FELL.

"Who is your choice?"

"Fred Parsons."

"Who are you going to vote for?"

"Dick Halstead is the only fellow fit to be captain of such a company as we're going to make of Washington One."

Belmont was in a fever of excitement.

At least, the younger part of the population was in that condition.

Many of the older people of the town had caught the infection.

There was an election on, and it was due to come off this evening.

Belmont, a bright, hustling and rather wealthy town of some nine thousand population, was situated on the western bank of the Fraser River.

Within the town limits were several manufactories.

There were also many elegant homes of the wealthier residents, for Belmont was not by any means a new town, and had several old and aristocratic families among its citizens.

Always a public-spirited place, Belmont was quick to adopt improvements for the town.

For years the fire department had consisted of one hand engine, known as "Torrent One," a hook and ladder truck



and a hose carriage, each manned by a competent and enthusiastic crew.

James Pelton, big, broad-shouldered, black-whiskered and middle-aged, had been the chief of the local fire department for more than fifteen years.

He was a veteran fire-fighter, and, up to last year, Belmont's fire losses had been lighter than in the average town of the same size.

But several new factories had been added to the town, more dwellings had gone up, and now it was seen that the fire risks had about doubled.

Plainly there was need for a larger fire department.

George Parsons, who, besides being president of the First National Bank, was also the leading real estate agent and sole fire insurance agent of Belmont, had been among the foremost in advocating a larger fire department.

Speaking as the agent of the fire insurance companies, Parsons had had an especially important voice.

Every merchant and every house, mill or block owner must insure his property against the ravages of fire.

It is most important to such property owners that the rates of fire insurance be as low as possible.

Now, in every case the great fire insurance companies regulate their insurance charges in a given town by the amount of protection that there is against fire.

The bigger and more capable the fire department, the less the risk is of property being destroyed by flames. Hence, the bigger the fire department the smaller the cost of fire insurance.

"My companies have notified me," proclaimed Mr. Parsons to the citizens, "that either we must have another engine and another hose wagon, or we must be prepared to pay higher rates for our insurance."

That announcement had waked up the citizens of Belmont.

The City Council promptly appropriated money for a new fire house and for an engine and hose cart.

The construction of the fire house, a neat, red brick structure, had been started just at the beginning of winter.

It was now finished.

On the ground floor was the apparatus room, in which stood the new hand engine, Washington One, and the hose cart.

Helmets, boots, rubber coats and other apparatus and appliances were stored in cupboards or lodged in racks in this apparatus room.

Overhead was another room, large, bright and airy. This was a "social hall" for the members of the company, or it could, at need, be made a sleeping apartment, as cots and blankets were piled up at one end.

From this hall to the apparatus room below ran a polished sliding pole through a hole in the floor. At the sound of the alarm any firemen who happened to be above could instantly slide to the room below and be ready to follow the call of duty.

Everything in the house of Washington One was the newest and best.

It was when it came to the composition of the new fire company that the excitement began.

It had always been a post of honor to serve in Belmont's fire department.

While the selection of the best fire-fighting material had always been the rule, yet the young men of the wealthier families had never hung back from joining the fire department.

Instead, young men from the leading families of the town had fought side by side with the factory hands.

Merit, and merit alone, counted.

Chief Pelton was the owner of a trucking company. He had men under his command whose fathers could sign valid checks for a hundred thousand dollars; he had others in the same companies who were young mechanics in the factories or clerks in the stores.

As merit was the sole test for membership in the Belmont fire department, which was strictly a volunteer organization, every energetic, courageous young man, whatever his walk in life, was eager to be enrolled as a fireman.

There had been many who had hoped that they would be chosen for the new company to be known as Washington One.

Yet Dick Halstead, the seventeen-year-old son of a widow who conducted the one typewriting establishment in Belmont, had come forward with a plan which, at first scoffed at, had finally carried the day.

"Why can't we get up a fire company wholly of boys?" he asked some of his friends. "Belmont has never had a company of fire-fighters who were all boys. Other towns have tried the experiment, and always, I believe, with good results."

Dick finally took his plan direct to Mr. Parsons, in the latter's offices over the bank.

Mr. Parsons hemmed and hawed as he sat looking at the committee of four Belmont boys who had come to urge the plan upon him.

Their leader, Dick Halstead, with his dark-brown hair, frank blue eyes, five feet seven of height, and his hundred and eighteen pounds of weight, was a fine specimen of the well-trained high school athlete.

In addition to his training in athletics, Dick had always "run with the machines" ever since he was eleven or twelve years old.

Though not a member of any of the companies, yet he had often done fine volunteer work in helping the older fire-fighters.

Twice, already, he had won the honor of saving lives in burning buildings.

Beside our hero, as he stood before George Parsons, was Hal Norton, a seventeen-year-old, very blond and very quiet boy.

Hal was a good deal of a dreamer, yet he was one of the kind who could wake up effectively.

He was the son of Dr. Norton, a physician who was too fond of his science and too willing to serve the very poor to have accumulated much of this world's goods.



In direct contrast to Hal was Joe Darrell.

He was eighteen years old, five feet six, weighing one hundred and fourteen pounds, and as dark as Hal was fair.

Joe was both hot-tempered and a sprinter. He seldom used his fleet feet when he became angry, but often employed his fists instead, and was a quick hitter and skillful boxer in addition.

Joe was the son of a Main Street druggist.

Then there was Terry Rourke, with his thin, freckled, jolly face.

Never a lad in town had a bigger heart, a readier tongue or a quicker fist at need, though Terry was anything but quarrelsome by nature.

Terry's mother, Bridget Rourke, was a short, broad and round, hustling business woman, who, on the death of her husband, found a livelihood for herself and her four children, of whom Terry was the eldest but one, in running a boarding-house for factory hands.

Twice she had moved, and each time into a larger boarding-house, until now she was looked upon as a rather prosperous woman.

Terry's great hold was at figures. In mathematics he was the smartest boy in the High School, where all the members of the present committee attended.

These were a representative lot of Belmont's brightest boys.

George Parsons felt that he could hardly afford to treat them slightly.

Yet he did not think much of the idea of a boys' company.

Dick, however, explained the project so earnestly and convincingly that Mr. Parsons found himself being slowly swung around to the idea.

"At least," he said finally, "it will be worth thinking of."

Mr. Parsons's son, Fred, a tall, dark, slender youth of eighteen, happened to be in the next office, behind a half-opened door.

Suddenly Fred stepped into the office.

"Pardon me, dad," he interrupted, and nodding at the committee, "but I have found those figures that you wanted. Here they are, sir."

Mr. Parsons took the piece of paper in some surprise, as he had not asked his son for any figures.

But Mr. Parsons's surprise increased considerably when he read these words, penciled by his son:

"By all means encourage the idea of a boys' fire company. I can be elected captain of the new company. I want you to put this through for me, dad."

"These figures seem to be all right. I will look them over later, Fred," said his father. "You might as well stay, Fred, and listen to the plans that I am talking over with these young gentlemen. We are thinking that perhaps the next fire company should be composed of boys, since boys in other towns have already made excellent records as firemen."

"Why, of course, sir, it's just the thing!" exclaimed

Fred, eagerly. "I'll go into it heart and soul, fellows, and do anything I can to push it along."

"Much would depend, of course," said Mr. Parsons, slyly, "on who is chosen to lead the new company. The right kind of a captain would make a success of it. Now, who should we have for a leader?"

He looked meaningly in his son's direction, but Dick Halstead put in quietly:

"It seems to me, sir, that the best way would be to organize the company first, and then let the fellows elect their own officers."

In order not to show his hand too plainly, Mr. Parsons agreed to this plan.

The matter was pushed with the fire chief, and with the Mayor, Ellis Thornton, a fine, aristocratic old gentleman, who had been the town's highest official for the last two years.

In the end, and thanks very largely to the energetic indorsement of Mr. Parsons, who represented the fire insurance companies, the project of forming a boys' fire company had been put through.

The City Council passed an act authorizing the forming of the company, Chief Pelton to pass upon the merits of the boys who applied.

More than three hundred boys did apply.

Chief Pelton had a hard time passing upon the claims of so many aspirants for honor, but at last he finished and announced his list of twenty-nine boys between the ages of fifteen and eighteen.

Dick Halstead and the members of his committee all succeeded in "making" the new fire company. So did Fred Parsons.

Then there was furious electioneering for the choice of a captain for Washington One.

George Parsons let it be generally known that he expected his son to be elected to the command of the company.

Fred himself said as much at every opportunity.

Dick Halstead was his only rival for the honor.

Dick himself would have been content to serve as a private in the ranks.

But Hal Norton had first proposed our hero for the honor, and Joe and Terry had quickly seconded it.

Then the campaign was on, hotly, for three days.

After that came the night on which the company was to be organized.

At eight o'clock Chief Pelton called the company to order in the hall at the fire house.

Mayor Thornton was also present, and so was Mr. Parsons.

A good many other citizens waited in the apparatus room below to know the result.

Every member of the fire company was present when Chief Pelton rapped for order.

"Young gentlemen," began the chief, "first of all, you will each raise your right hand while his honor the Mayor swears you in as members of the Belmont fire department."



In hushed silence the new young firemen held up their right hands.

Slowly, solemnly, impressively, Mayor Thornton swore them in.

"Firemen should always be brisk and business-like," was Chief Pelton's next announcement. "So, without speeches, we will proceed to the election of a captain for Washington One."

"Are you going to have any nominating speeches?" asked Mr. Parsons.

"Waste of time, sir," returned the chief, briskly. "I believe every member has made up his mind who he is to vote for. So I'll just pass around slips of paper. Each member will write on his slip the name of his choice for captain of the company."

"Young gentlemen," smiled the mayor, "I hope you will all take pains to vote right."

That was another way of advising them to vote for Fred Parsons, whom the mayor was known to favor on account of his friendship for Mr. Parsons.

"I would like information," broke in Joe Darrell.

"Well, Darrell?" asked the fire chief.

"Shall we vote for all the officers of the company at one time?"

"No; this first ballot will be for captain of the company. Afterward we will take a ballot for lieutenant, and then, separately, for foreman of the engine and foreman of the hose crew."

Thereupon the young firemen fell to scribbling.

"Fold your ballots," requested Chief Pelton, "and I will pass the hat for them."

The ballots collected, Chief Pelton passed into a little cupboard of a room at the rear of the hall.

He was followed by Mayor Thornton and Mr. Parsons, who were to act with him as tellers of the vote.

Dick Halstead turned and fell to chatting with the nearest of his friends.

Fred Parsons was plainly worried, though he tried not to show it, and sat apart, not speaking.

After five minutes the tellers came in, their faces betraying none of the news for which Belmont's fire boys waited so eagerly.

"Young gentlemen," announced Pelton, "only two candidates have been voted for."

There was a strained hush.

Each of those candidates could feel his heart beating under his ribs.

"Fred Parsons," went on the chief, "received nine votes, and Dick Halstead eighteen. Halstead is therefore elected captain of the company."

"Wow!"

"Whoop!"

"Hurrah!"

The cheer led into three and a tiger for Dick Halstead, the chosen leader of Washington One.

Over the din could be heard Chief Pelton's voice shouting:

"We will now hold the vote for a lieutenant."

"See here!" cried Parsons, striding in front of the young firemen, his face white with disgust and humiliation, "I decline to run for any office!"

## CHAPTER II.

### A STORMY TIME OF IT.

"Three cheers for Fred Parsons, then!" chipped in a mischievous voice from the rear of the hall.

But Mr. Parsons started forward, his face purpling with anger.

"Fred!" he called sharply.

Then, turning to the young firemen, the bank president and insurance agent went on crisply:

"Young gentlemen, I must ask you to understand that it is sometimes hard to be defeated. You must put down to natural resentment my boy's refusal to run for lieutenant. Indeed, in view of his great amount of work in making this fire company possible, it seems to me that he should be elected at least lieutenant."

"Sure, that's a nominating speech, ain't it?" demanded Terry Rourke, bluntly.

Mr. Parsons was in danger of becoming as angry as his son, but he had the good sense to calm down.

"I didn't mean that as a nominating speech, young gentlemen," he answered, addressing them all.

Then the slips were passed and the balloting for a lieutenant proceeded.

Again the folded slips were collected, and again the tellers filed out. When they returned Mr. Pelton announced briefly:

"For lieutenant, Fred Parsons has seven votes——"

Fred Parsons ground his heel savagely in the floor.

"Joe Darrell has five votes, and Henry Norton sixteen. Norton is therefore elected as your lieutenant."

Again there was a rousing whoop. Dick and Joe leaped over to where Hal stood, gripping both his hands.

"We will now," announced Chief Pelton, as soon as the cheering had stopped, "vote for a foreman for the engine crew."

Fred Parsons, his face white as a sheet, bawled out:

"Let it be understood that I am not a candidate for any office in this company!"

"Mr. Chief," called one short, stocky boy at the rear, rising just as he finished chewing the last morsel of a sandwich that he had brought with him, "I rise for information."

He spoke with his mouth full of food.

"What is it, Sam Bangs?" asked the chief.

The boy was so bungling and awkward, despite his great strength, that he was usually known as "Slam Bangs."

"He wants to know," piped up a small voice, "if this meeting is to be followed by a collation."

There was a roar of hearty laughter, for Sam was known as the boy who was always eating. There was a saying that



Sam got along on short sleep in order to have more time for eating.

"I rise to a point of information," Sam went on again, after he had bolted the last of the sandwich down his gullet. "Fred Parsons has announced that he isn't a candidate for any office. I would like to know, and I think others would—has any one asked Fred Parsons to run for any office?"

"Good!" thumped out half a dozen voices at once. "Hooray for Slam Bangs!"

"Come to order," said Chief Pelton, sharply. "We will now ballot for the foreman of the engine crew."

Joe Darrell was chosen for that position.

Terry Rourke next had his innings. He was elected foreman of the hose crew.

"That, young gentlemen, concludes the voting. You have now chosen all your officers."

Fred Parsons had sat gloomily through it all.

Now he rose to go.

"Wait a moment, Parsons," ordered the chief. "Are you preparing to go?"

"Yes," growled the unhappy candidate.

"You have not yet secured the permission of your captain to leave the meeting, nor has it been declared adjourned."

"Hang the captain!" ripped out Fred.

"Fred!" called his father, sharply.

"Parsons!" thundered the chief, "it is against the discipline of the fire department to speak disrespectfully of your officers. You will show the proper spirit now by apologizing."

"To you?"

"Rather to your captain."

"What?" demanded Fred, wheeling about. "Apologize to—to that?"

He pointed the finger of contempt at Dick Halstead.

"Apologize to your captain!" thundered the chief, "or you are not fit to remain in the fire department!"

"And I won't remain, either!" shouted back white-faced Fred, his voice shaking with passion. "I don't want to be in your hanged old department! I——"

"Fred!" warned his father, going close to the lad and gripping his arm.

There were muttered words between the pair that the others did not hear. Mayor Thornton, his face crossed by lines of worry, went over and joined them.

"Chief Pelton!" Fred Parsons called out, presently, "if there is any apology due—which I doubt—I offer it to you as the head of the department. That is as far as I will go, sir."

"Then I will not even accept a resignation from you," retorted Mr. Pelton. "I shall suspend you and prefer charges against you!"

"My resignation is already accepted," sneered Fred, "by the mayor."

Mr. Thornton nodded toward the chief as if to confirm this.

Chief Pelton snorted, but remained otherwise silent.

Fred Parsons stalked through the door.

As he went, followed by his father, a storm of sharp hisses broke loose.

"Stop this! Stop this!" warned Mayor Thornton, holding up his hand.

The hissing thereupon died out.

"I regard it as an extremely bad omen," went on the mayor, sorrowfully, "that the first meeting of Washington One should turn out in this fashion."

"Who started it?" demanded several indignant voices.

"Perhaps young Parsons was a bit nettled," replied the mayor. "Defeated candidates often feel that way, and I cannot help feeling that you would have done well to have given Parsons one of the offices within your gift. He would have been a useful member of the company. And now I will wish you good-night, young gentlemen, and leave you with your chief."

Mayor Thornton left the hall with a slow, dignified step.

Someone started a cheer for the mayor, and it rippled around the hall.

"I don't believe I've got much to say to you in the way of a speech," went on Chief Pelton. "I've seen all of you youngsters running with the machines in the past, and I've seen most of you do good volunteer work at fires when allowed to do so. You know, of course, that it's a volunteer fireman's first duty, when the alarm sounds, to drop everything else and hustle either to the fire house or to the fire. At the fire the main duty of those who are not officers is to obey the orders of those who are. You must be honest, quick, alert, brave, for, to be a good fireman, a really good fireman, a fellow has to have every single blessed quality of manhood. Now, this is all I've got to say here. I'm going to order you all downstairs now, where I'll see how much you know about handling the apparatus that will be entrusted to your hands after this. Down with you!"

With a subdued whoop the young firemen of Belmont made a rush for the sliding pole.

One after another they descended by this means.

Chief Pelton came last of all.

Then, for an hour, followed the hardest, briskest kind of a drill in some of the duties of a fireman.

"Now, I don't want to fill your heads up with too much at first," smiled the black-whiskered chief, at last. "You've had enough drill for to-night, and I believe you know how to tumble out in lively fashion if there's an alarm. Remember, at a fire no fireman is to hold opinions of his own. He must jump to obey the orders of his officers. The privates in the ranks will obey their foremen, lieutenant, and captain. The under officers must be ready to obey instantly the slightest order from their captain. And you, Captain Halstead, will be held strictly responsible for the promptness with which you follow my orders. Now, captain, you may dismiss your company as soon as you please."

With that the chief turned away and sought his home.

"I've just one word to say," murmured Dick, surveying the crowd of faces around him. "Fellows, I thank you all



for the handsome way that you supported me for captain. If it's in me, I'm going to show you how good a captain I can be. That's all. Again I thank you. Company dismissed!"

But, before the youngsters would take their dismissal there had to be cheers for Dick, more for Hal, and still more cheering for Joe and Terry.

"And finally," proposed Dick, his face glowing with the enthusiasm of the happy night, "three times three for good old Belmont and Washington One!"

By the time this was finished twenty-eight lusty youngsters had cheered themselves hoarse.

Then and there they broke up, each going his own way.

Sam Bangs, feeling hungry again, and finding that he had a few nickels about him, headed for an all-night restaurant.

Hal had to hurry away to escort his mother home from a concert.

Joe had to hustle home for other reasons.

"Terry," proposed Dick, "I don't feel sleepy. Do you?"

"Slapey, is it?" demanded Terry Rourke. "Not a bit av it."

"Then suppose we take a two or three-mile walk in this crisp winter air before we turn in?"

"Sure! I'm wid ye on that."

The two newly elected young officers of Washington One stepped briskly up the little side street on which the new engine house stood.

"Sure, Oi can't hilp laughing ivery toime Oi think av thot fool, Fred Parsons," laughed Terry, as the pair crossed Main Street.

"I'm sorry for him," said Dick, honestly.

"Sorry for the loikes av him? What for—for being such a fool?"

"Well, it's a hard knock to feel sure of getting elected and then being turned down."

"Av you'd lost the iliction, wud ye be asking for yer friends' tears?" demanded Terry.

"No; but I might feel sore under my coat," admitted Dick, honestly.

"Sure, Oi hope he's feelin' sore," grunted Terry. "To my way av thinkin', Fred Parsons is a bit av a sneak."

"Oh, well, Terry, old fellow, we'll drop him good-naturedly," urged Dick. "He's out of the company now, so there's nothing more to be said."

Terry grunted, and let it drop at that.

Keeping on, they turned into Ellis Street, which ran parallel with Main Street.

Ellis Street, while it did not contain the most elegant homes in the town, was yet a part of Belmont in which many people of fairly good means had their homes.

Yet some fine old houses had for neighbors shanties or poor-looking business blocks.

It was a "mixed" street, from which many of the wealthy families had already been driven.

But right here at the corner was a rather solid-looking mansion, in which dwelt the Vanes.

Dick was the first to turn the corner into Ellis Street. As he did so, he thrust out an arm, checking Terry's onward march.

"Hold on!" whispered Dick, sharply, standing in the shadow of the building and peering down in front of the Vane residence. "It looks like something doing."

"It sure does!" agreed Terry.

### CHAPTER III.

#### BEAUTY AND THE BEASTS.

Just a minute before three persons had descended from the steps of the Vane residence.

These were John Lester, his daughter Catherine, and the latter's girl chum, Faith Vane.

Father and daughter had been visiting the Vanes for the evening.

Now, Faith was to drive out to the handsome Lester residence to spend the night with Miss Lester.

"That fool coachman isn't in sight yet," grumbled Mr. Lester, turning up his coat collar. "I told him to be here at the time, sharp."

"Oh, he'll be here soon, papa," Kitty Lester replied. "And it isn't such a cold night to wait."

"Come back into the house," suggested Faith.

"No. I'm not going to call your folks up again," replied Mr. Lester. "They've probably started for bed."

"It won't be a long wait," said Kitty, soothingly, for she saw that her father was irritated over the coachman's delay.

"I believe I'll go up the block and get some cigars," proposed Mr. Lester. "Do you young ladies care to walk with me, or would you prefer to wait here?"

"Hadn't we better wait here, papa?" suggested Kitty. "Arnold will be here with the carriage, and might drive away again."

"Well, I think you young ladies will be safe enough here," replied Mr. Lester.

"Safe?" smiled Kitty. "Of course we shall. Who would think of stealing us?"

"Many a young fellow would be tempted to steal you two girls, if he dared," smiled Mr. Lester to himself, as he turned and walked up the street.

Chatting briskly, the girls had no thought of being annoyed.

Yet, as Mr. Lester had told himself, these two girls were well worth the trouble of stealing.

Kitty Lester was some three inches more than five feet in height.

Her dark hair seemed like a crown of glory to her refined, beautiful oval face.

Of slender, well-rounded figure, Kitty Lester would have looked queenly, had not that notion been given the lie by the laughing, friendly look that usually lay in those bright brown eyes of hers.

She was dressed, as usual, in the most tasteful garments that wealth could provide, for Mr. and Mrs. John



Lester, possessing a great fortune, and only one child, spent much of their time in deciding what was most becoming to Kitty.

Yet wealth and style had not spoiled Kitty Lester, nor had her beauty made her vain.

Faith Vane was like her chum in nothing but sweetness.

She was shorter and somewhat plumper. Her hair was of the first shade of very light brown that is beyond golden.

Her eyes were a deep blue, eyes that were not as often laughing as were Kitty Lester's.

Yet Faith Vane had a rich sense of the humorous when it appealed to her.

Being so different from each other in many things, the two girls were admirably suited to be chums.

Miss Kitty, being seventeen, was a year older than Miss Faith.

"Your father seemed provoked with Arnold," hinted Miss Vane.

"Oh, a little irritated, that is all," Kitty replied. "He is always a bit put out when others are not just on time to the second. But, after Arnold reaches here, and papa is riding home in the carriage, he won't think of the matter again."

Two figures, half-swaggering, half-skulking, came down Ellis Street from the same direction in which Mr. Lester had disappeared.

They were a pair of toughs and bullies from Norwich, the town just across the river.

Known as "Sliney" Gamp and "Rack" Evans, this precious pair had already put in a few years each in a reform school in a neighboring State.

Released, they had fled to Norwich, which they now claimed as their home.

Now, they made a living somehow, by small stealings and other petty rascalities, and so far they had escaped being detected at their small breaches of the law.

Sliney Gamp, the elder, was nineteen years old.

Rack Evans, seventeen, looked up to Sliney in all forms of rascality.

To him, Sliney was one of the greatest persons alive.

Both gloried in their toughness.

They were strong, and good fighters at a pinch, though they often preferred to win by sneaking.

Now, as they came along, they caught sight of the two girls standing at the curb.

"Hey!" hailed Sliney. "Looks queer to see peaches ripe in winter, don't it?"

"They're sure peaches," remarked Rack, casting a critical glance over the two annoyed girls.

Both young roughs halted, staring impudently at the girls.

"Good-evening," said Sliney, with sham politeness, and making a mocking gesture of raising his battered cap.

Both girls turned their backs upon the roughs.

"Oh, they're toney, they are!" uttered Rack, in a tone of deep disgust. "They don't believe we're their style."

"I say, girls, ye needn't be uppish, ye know," observed Sliney.

Neither Kitty nor Faith made any answer.

They would have tried to walk away, but they felt that that move would start trouble.

"Shake, won't ye?" leered Sliney, stepping around in front of Kitty, and holding out his big, coarse, dirty paw.

"It's either shake hands or kiss, ye know," observed Rack Evans, sneeringly.

"Say, it wouldn't be a bad scheme to take a kiss off 'em," grinned Sliney.

"I'll call my folks," muttered Faith, turning to cross the sidewalk, and dart up the steps of her home.

But Rack placed himself squarely in her way at the foot of the steps.

"No, ye don't!" he warned. "Ye don't get no help. We're gents, we are, and don't take the frosty mitt from no girls. It's shake or kiss—and by jingo, I b'lieve it'll hav ter be a kiss!"

"Pretty sparklers, them," commented Sliney, admiringly, as he reached out and touched one of the diamonds glistening in Kitty's ear-lobe.

Miss Kitty turned and cast a half-frightened look up the street in the direction in which her father had gone.

"Come, yez going to be friendly?" insinuated Sliney.

"Cause if ye ain't——" Rack started to add, warningly.

This was the scene which Dick Halstead and Terry Rourke had halted for an instant, in amazement, to witness.

The next second Dick went striding forward.

"You infernal scamp!" our hero cried, angrily. "Why are you annoying this young lady? Get away from here!"

While Terry had made a bee-line in Miss Faith's direction.

Rack was just trying to make good on his coveted kiss.

He reached out to seize Faith's hands when Terry darted in.

Smack!

It came so quickly that Rack Evans, taken unawares, went down flat to the sidewalk before Terry's sturdy fist.

He was up again in an instant, and fighting mad, yet with caution enough left to back off and size up the hot-tempered and hard-fisted young Irishman.

Kitty, with a cry of relief, sprang to Faith's side, and, on the steps, the two girls turned to look on.

"What are ye butting in for?" demanded Sliney.

"For the simple reason that you two fellows are acting like curs and cowards in annoying unprotected young ladies," Dick answered, coolly.

"It ain't none of your funeral!" glowered Sliney.

"I'm going to make it my affair," returned Dick, in the same cool tone. "Are you ready to back away?"

"Not on your say so."

Sliney Gamp had fallen back a step, throwing himself on his guard.

Dick saw that there was nothing for it but to fight.



That being the case, he lost not a second.

He took a step forward, leading with his right.

It was only a feint, but Sliney parried furiously, and, in so doing, laid himself open to Dick's waiting left.

Crack!

It struck Sliney under one eye, leaving a red welt that would soon be black.

"Rush 'em, Rack! Slaughter 'em!" roared Sliney, maddened by the pain.

Then there followed instantly a pitched battle.

In a street encounter neither of the toughs was by any means a coward.

Both were full of nasty tricks that never "go" among boxers with honor.

It was a hard, swift mix-up, with blows given and taken every second of the time.

But Dick, still cool despite the speed of the fight, watched his chance for a full minute through the fast mill.

Then, as Sliney panted, Dick saw his chance.

Fainting with his left, and causing Gamp to throw his full power into warding, Dick delivered with his right.

Delivered! Well, he came mighty near to blotting Sliney Gamp off the map.

Smash!

That blow landed under Sliney's nose, and upward, with weight and steam enough to all but drive Gamp's nose backward through his head.

Down like a falling tree fell the older tough.

He was all but "out," and lay there, winded, and groaning, until Dick seized him by the collar and drew him to his feet with a jerk.

"Get away from here, now!" ordered Dick, crisply. "If you don't, I'll hurt you the next thing you know."

If Sliney Gamp wasn't hurt already, he certainly thought he was.

Feeling too weak and dazed to keep up even a bluff, he turned, slinking away.

"Finished your man?" panted Terry, still fighting savagely. "Bedad, 'tis slow Oi am!"

With that, Terry, who was fighting as if mainly for the exercise of the thing, suddenly ducked in under and landed a rock-like fist on Rack Evans' wind.

"No, ye won't!" uttered Terry, indignantly, as Rack lay on the sidewalk, breathing hard. "Ye'll not use the strate for a lodgin' house. Up an' off wid ye—afther the bad luck token ye thravel wid for a mate!"

And Terry Rourke, fairly dragging Rack to his feet, sent him spinning dizzily after Sliney, who was making fair time down Ellis Street.

A newcomer there was upon the scene, just at this moment.

Unnoticed, this newcomer halted in amazement, which gradually grew to disgust.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lester, and Miss Vane, for making such a scene before you," cried Dick, advancing toward the girls, as he lifted his hat. "We couldn't do

anything else but fight under the circumstances. I am sorry we didn't happen along a minute earlier, and then there would have been no trouble."

"Are you hurt?" asked Kitty Lester, looking anxiously at both of the boys.

"Not a bit," answered Dick, promptly.

"Hur-rt, is it?" demanded Terry, amazedly. "Hur-rt be the little kitten Oi was playin' wid?"

As was usual when he was excited, Terry's brogue came out more strongly than usual.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're not hurt," sighed Kitty, quickly. "It was splendid of you to step in the way you did."

"Not splendid—just natural," smiled Dick, easily.

But very soon, under the powerful eyes of Miss Kitty Lester, he began to feel uneasy.

For Dick was but little used to the company of girls.

Faith, in the meantime, was trying to express her gratitude to Terry Rourke.

"Faith, I——" began Terry.

"I am Miss Vane," replied Faith, ever so simply, but promptly.

"Faith, I——"

"Miss Vane, if you don't mind," again spoke the girl.

"Well, faith, then——"

Miss Vane looked annoyed at what she supposed to be Terry's persistent familiarity.

But Kitty stepped forward, smiling, almost laughing.

"Faith, dear, wait a moment."

Then, turning to Terry with her sweetest, friendliest smile, Kitty asked:

"Away back there is some Irish blood in your veins, isn't there, Mr. ——"

"Rourke is my name, ma'am," Terry answered, promptly. "As to Oirish, Oi'm all Oirish—niver another drop av blood in me."

"Now, my dear, you know," observed Miss Kitty, again turning to her chum, "you know when an Irishman wishes to swear politely, he swears by his faith."

"Faith we do," confirmed Terry, solemnly. "Faith, 'tis a nate, swate way av swearin'."

"I thought he was calling me by my first name," cried Faith Vane, coloring.

Then she stepped forward, holding out her hand to Terry, who seized it eagerly with the greatest care, as if it were something fragile that might break at a touch.

"Mr. Halstead," smiled Kitty, looking into our hero's eyes, "I have met you before to-night."

To be sure she had. Mr. Lester was an occasional customer in his mother's typewriting office.

"Will you kindly present your friend to us both?" requested Miss Kitty Lester.

This Dick did, with the best grace that he could summon.

"You have won our deepest gratitude," protested Kitty, warmly. "Perhaps, some other time, we shall be much better able to say what we want to say in thanks than we seem able to do now."



"And we beg that you will never again give so trifling a matter a thought," begged Dick.

"What's this?" came from the loiterer who had stopped to look on in displeased surprise.

It was Fred Parsons, an old acquaintance of Miss Kitty's, and, for the past year, a most devoted admirer of hers.

"Oh, Fred, I am glad you have come," cried Kitty, moving quickly forward to him. "You will be able to thank Mr. Halstead and his friend, Mr. Rourke, for the splendid way in which they protected us from annoyance."

Kitty poured out a swift, enthusiastic account of what had happened, while Fred Parsons fidgeted and looked most uncomfortable.

"Thank you, then," said Fred, at last, in a most ungracious tone, as he turned to our hero. "And now you can take yourselves away. The young ladies will have my protection."

"Oh, Fred!" protested Miss Kitty, reproachfully. "Aren't these young gentlemen members of your fire company? Surely, you don't think that you have a right to speak to them thus, just because you are captain of the company?"

"No, Kitty, I am not the captain of a fire company. The new company turned out to be a pack of young hoodlums, and I won't have anything to do with it. I'm out of it."

Dick, who knew that Fred Parsons was Miss Kitty's rather frequent escort, had no wish to intrude.

"We'll wish you good-evening, now, Miss Lester, and Miss Vane."

"Not until you've shaken hands with us," forbade Miss Kitty, quickly, as she stepped forward, extending that warm, friendly little hand in its trim glove.

She shook hands with both of the young firemen, Miss Faith doing the same.

Again good-nights were spoken, and Miss Kitty added: "Remember, we want to see you again, Mr. Halstead and Mr. Rourke."

"Kitty, you don't want anything to do with that pair, or any of their crew," spoke Parsons, sulkily, as soon as the young firemen had gone around the corner.

"Oh, but I surely do," protested Miss Kitty Lester, promptly.

"Kitty, I don't want you associating with such hoodlum trash," rebuked Fred Parsons.

"I'm afraid, Fred, that it's going to get you into trouble if you form any idea that you can control my conduct," shot back Miss Kitty, spiritedly.

Fred had the good sense to say no more.

Arnold was driving up, anyway, and Mr. Lester was striding down the sidewalk, puffing hard at a cigar.

Terry, in the meantime, had his tongue going fast in praise of the girls whom they had just left.

"Ain't they just illigant, though?" wound up Terry, enthusiastically.

"Yes," Dick admitted, with a sigh. "But we aren't in

their class, Terry, old fellow, so we'll do well not to think of them too much."

"Now, what harrum will thinkin' do?" demanded Terry.

"To think of girls like them, when we don't move in the same crowd, may interfere with our rest, Terry, old fellow," smiled Dick, half-wistfully.

"But the fine eyes av little Miss Faith——" Terry started in, all over again.

"Cut it," ordered Dick. "Cut it, just as they'll cut us, after we've met them once more and they've thanked us again. Think of something else, lad. Think of that sight, for instance!"

Dick halted, with a grin, just at the doorway of the all-night restaurant on Main Street.

Inside, there was just one patron at a table, and that one was Sam Bangs, the ever-hungry boy.

Slam Bangs was just finishing the last of a big order of steak and potatoes.

"Where does he put it all?" muttered Dick, curiously.

"He must have two or three extra stomachs," suggested Terry. "Look at him—th' eager way he shovels the grub in. What does he make ye think av, Dick?"

"It'd be a shame to say," smiled Dick, watching Slam Bangs' last efforts at satisfying his appetite.

"Thin Oi'll tell ye what he makes a feller think av," proposed Terry Rourke, quickly. "Slam Bangs, good feller though he is, is just a hog whin ye foind him at a table. Watch him! Don't he act just like the greedy beasts thot can't keep their feet out av the trough? There he goes again—wid his feet in the trough!"

"Come on," begged Dick. "Come along before he hears us."

"I'll see ye at school in the morning," said Terry, as they came to the place of parting.

In Belmont the High School opened at eight o'clock in the morning, and the day's work was over at one o'clock in the afternoon.

"Ye'll be callin' for a drill the afthernoon, won't ye?" asked Terry.

"Yes; I'll pass the word around in the morning," Dick answered. "We can all get to the fire house by two and go through a lot of work. Terry, when we do turn out for the first time we want to show what real fireman stuff there is in us."

"Thot we do," agreed Terry. "'Tis nothin' but practice makes the fireman."

"Good night, Terry!"

"Good night, Dick! Wirra! 'Tis thinkin' Oi am thot the foine eyes av Miss Faith——"

"Cut that," laughed Dick, drily, and turned to walk away.

Yet despite his own sensible advice, he caught himself thinking most earnestly of another pair of "fine eyes."

"I'm a fool!" uttered the young fire captain, disgustedly. "I'll wager that Miss Lester isn't wasting any thoughts on either Terry or myself. What a little aristocrat Miss Vane looked when she thought Terry was addressing her by her



first name! But she had Terry dead wrong if she thought that lad would know how to be disrespectful to a girl or woman!"

He had two blocks yet to go ere he reached the little seven-room cottage in which he and his mother lived.

Around the next corner hung those two vampires of the night, Sliney Gamp and Rack Evans.

"That's Halstead coming now," uttered Sliney, in a hoarse whisper, as he drew back from peering around the corner.

"Are ye sure?" demanded Rack.

"Sure? Of course I am!"

"'Cause we don't want'er hang for doing some one else!" warned Rack.

"It's Halstead. Hand me the brick, Rack."

Quickly Evans passed it forward. The "brick" was a solid, ten-pound paving-stone that they had pried up in one of the streets.

"Take good aim, Sliney, right at arm's length!" chattered Rack, hoarsely. "Let him have it on the head, just as his head shows past the corner!"

"Sh!" warned Sliney. "Here he is—to get it!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE HURRY CALL TO ELLIS STREET.

Dick came on, thinking of nothing less than he did of possible peril.

He was almost at the corner, around which lurked Sliney Gamp, ready to crush the young fireman's head in with the paving stone.

For Gamp and Evans both had been drinking and both were wildly reckless of consequences.

Someone down that side street threw up the curtain at a second-story window, letting out a bright flood of light.

The light threw two dark shadows across Dick Halstead's path on the sidewalk.

There, in a flash, he saw the whole tableau of the fearful thing that awaited him.

Sliney, with an oath, leaped forward, the big stone up-lifted in his hand, and let drive with fearful force.

But Dick, warned by the shadows, had jumped aside just in the nick of time.

Past him whizzed the heavy missile, dropping in the road.

"Get him, anyway!" raged Rack Evans. "The two of us can do him!"

Sliney had, in fact, jumped forward for this very purpose.

But now he halted, standing still, afraid.

For Dick, taking in the whole situation at a glance, saw his only safe course except flight.

Promptly the young fire captain had wheeled and pounced upon the paving-stone.

Now he stood with that doughty weapon poised, ready to let it heave.

"Cut it!" gasped Sliney, slinking back, ducking, and breaking into a run.

Rack, at the signal, was off after his mate.

Dick stood where he was, still holding the paving-stone, until he lost sight of the tough pair in the distant blackness of the night.

"Humph!" muttered the young fireman, dropping the heavy stone. "That is what it is to be a human snake! They're afraid, except when the odds are all with them."

Then, with a grateful glance toward that friendly glow at the second-story window down the street, the glow that had saved him, Dick hurried on homeward.

His mother had already retired.

Letting himself in softly, Dick removed his shoes for his slippers, then stole softly off upstairs.

He turned in between the sheets.

Yet it was not to sleep, at first.

Too much had been crowded into his night to permit of instant rest and slumber.

First of all, he had won his great ambition, to command Washington One.

Of his fight, and of the narrow escape following it, he thought but little.

They were mere parts of the day's work.

But of his meeting with Miss Lester and Miss Vane he thought much.

"There's one point at which Fred Parsons can win out against me, hands down," thought the young fireman, with a thrill of sadness. "Fred's father is president of the bank, and I'm the son of a typewriter. He can call on Miss Lester whenever he wants, and she's glad to see him. I'd be thought pretty fresh if I even stopped to speak to her in the street. Whew! What a laying out Parsons must have given me to Miss Lester! So we're a fire company of young hoodlums, are we? I suppose, now, Fred Parsons really will take pains to repeat that everywhere. Ginger! We'll show people whether we're hoodlums or real budding firemen!"

At length Dick fell asleep, but it was a queer, bewildering jumble of things that he dreamed of that night.

Yet he was awake and down to breakfast on time the next morning.

His mother had already heard of his election over his rival, and warmly congratulated him.

As Dick ate his breakfast he told his mother of the meeting with the young ladies the night before, and of the thrashing that Sliney and Rack had received.

He purposely omitted, however, any allusion to the later attempt of the young toughs to break his head.

That news would only worry his mother, without doing any good at all.

"Of course, it's a grand thing for you to be a fireman," remarked Mrs. Halstead, with a slight shudder, "but I can't help worrying about the fearful risks that you may get yourself into at some of those awful fires."

"Mother, you've always brought me up to understand



that you'd expect me to fight for my country's flag in war time."

"In war time, yes, Dick."

"Well, mother, doesn't it strike you that in times of peace the real and manly thing is to fight fire instead of human enemies? In war we serve our country. In peace times we serve our own town. In either case we're serving others."

"That's the right way to look at it," approved Mrs. Halstead.

Much, very much of her son's great manliness was due to her own staunch training of his young ideas.

The breakfast over, Dick walked with his mother down to the office building on Main Street, where she and one young woman assistant carried on the work of the type-writing establishment.

From there he hurried on to the High School.

At recess the members of Washington One who were students at the High School gathered by themselves, and to them Dick passed the order for the afternoon drill, beginning at two o'clock.

Six of the members, who were employed in local factories, and four more who were clerks in stores or offices, could not, of course, be present at the drill.

As school let out at one o'clock there was a whoop from the young firemen as they raced through the school yard.

Youth is ever eager to play with a new toy.

Little did these fire boys of Belmont realize how soon they were to be called upon to act in earnest.

Only one member—Slam Bangs—was late at the fire house.

"Has anyone seen Bangs?" asked Dick, as the engine house clock showed the minute of two o'clock.

"Ye'll foind him at the hog trough, more'n likely," grinned Terry, "wid both feet in th' trough."

That caused a laugh, which became redoubled when one member espied Sam coming around the corner, munching one apple and holding another tight in the palm of his left hand.

"Hurry up, Sam!" called Joe Darrell.

"What's the rush?" inquired Slam Bangs, not quickening his pace.

"Is that the way you'd run to a fire?" demanded Joe, disgustedly.

"Where's the fire?" queried Sam, placidly.

"Undher mother's cook-stove lid," grinned Terry.

"Whenever you're through with your meal, Sam," explained Dick, patiently, "you can get into your fire togs. Then we'll see if there's any wrinkles we can show you about fire duty."

"Oh, I'll be through," responded Sam, "as soon as I've eaten this other apple. I was a bit hungry to-day."

The slip between the cup and the lip was illustrated by Joe Darrell.

Just as Slam was raising the second apple for a big bite, Joe slipped up behind him, snatched the apple, and sent it scaling over a roof.

"That's wasting a mighty good piece of grub," grumbled Slam, not angrily.

"Get into your togs, Sam," ordered Dick. "And hurry—do!"

Slam, when he found the other young firemen laughing at him, made a rush for his togs.

Scrape! Bim! Poor Bangs tripped over the nearer hub of the hose cart and went sprawling.

But accidents must come to an end, even with one as clumsily unfortunate as Sam Bangs was.

"With the help of Hal Norton, Sam was togged out, "just like a fireman," as Joe teasingly remarked.

"To your stations—like lightning!" rang Dick Halstead's voice, suddenly and unexpectedly.

All hands fell in at their proper places with the machines, as easily as if they had been long drilled at the work.

Even Slam Bangs got to his post without disaster.

"Now, then—out with you! Right wheel! Fly!"

The way the engine and hose cart, hauled by their fleet-footed crews, made the corner of Main Street was a caution.

Just at Main Street Dick tried the difficult maneuver of a swift about face.

But this was accomplished on the jump and run.

"Understand that the fire is at the fire house!" bellowed Dick through his trumpet as he ran alongside the line. "Show how fast you can get the hose coupled and a stream playing down the street."

Captain Dick halted, watch in hand, before the fire house, watching the flight of the seconds while the hose crew reeled off the hose, coupled it, and the hand engine crew got to work at the bars.

"If you fellows can work it all as swiftly as that at a real fire, there won't be much fault found with you," glowed Dick. "Now, then——"

Clang! Ding!

Here was a real alarm coming in. No make believe about that.

"Don't get flustered!" shouted Captain Dick. "Don't get in each other's way. You've got time to get uncoupled and everything shipshape before the alarm is all in."

"Twenty-seven!" he finished counting. "Holmes and Ellis Streets!"

In just nine seconds after the first round of the alarm had come in the Belmont fire boys had everything snug and were at their stations.

In reality they had lost no time, as usually more time would be lost in getting on the fire togs.

"It's a short dash! Show how you fellows can sprint!" called Captain Dick, as he himself set the example, Hal close at his side.

"Queer, but that's the corner where Terry and I had the row last night," muttered Dick. "I hope it isn't the Vanes' fine house."

But it was, as Dick saw the instant that he had dashed across Main Street.



Flames and black smoke were piling out of the second-story rear at a tremendous rate.

"It looks as if the place must be doomed," muttered Dick to Hal.

"It won't be, if we can stop it," gritted Hal.

Away off on some other block they could hear the jangling bell of a moving piece of fire department apparatus.

"That must be Torrent One!" observed Hal.

"No, by Jupiter, it isn't!" gasped Dick. "Don't you understand, Hal?"

"What?"

"This is only a first alarm!"

"Well?"

"As Belmont has been redistricted, only Washington One answers box 27 on the first call."

"Then that machine——"

"Is Hook and Ladder No. 1."

"And Dick!"

"What?"

"Until Torrent One is called out, or Chief Pelton comes, you'll be in command at the fire."

"Not for long."

"You're going to——"

"Ring in a second at once!" shouted back Dick over his shoulder, as he put on an extra burst and sprinted ahead. "We need the whole fire department to handle that blaze!"

Dick had shown the real instinct of the fireman at the first simple test.

He might win added glory by doing his best to fight the fire alone, but a fireman's first duty is to put out fire.

Hence Dick was resolved upon calling out the whole department, and missing the brief chance to be acting chief at his first fire.

A crowd of neighborhood people had gathered before the Vane mansion by the time that Captain Dick reached the corner.

He reached the box, got the hook between his thumb and finger, and sent the second alarm throbbing in over the wires.

Next he turned, beckoning Hal to run the engine and hose cart into Ellis Street.

"We'll give Torrent the back of the house," he called through the trumpet. "Now, then, lively with the hose, boys. Send the stream at the second-story windows—right in through them!"

Jangle! Hook and Ladder No. 1, with its crew of men, was just reaching the spot.

"Halt just at the corner, on Holmes Street!" ordered young Captain Dick, through his trumpet. "Get off a second-story ladder in a hurry!"

Jason Sharp, Belmont's wiry, active chief of police, was already on the scene with three of his men.

"We'll want fire lines, chief!" shouted Dick, taking in the crowds that were pouring down Holmes and Ellis Streets. "Keep everyone back!"

Sizz-zz! Drench! The stream from Washington's hose had struck one of the closed windows on the second floor, breaking the glass and pouring in a torrent of water against the flames that leaped out.

Dick turned just in time to see Sliney Gamp and Rack Evans sneaking close to the burning house.

They were there to pretend to help, but Dick knew that their real purpose was to be on hand for robbery in the excitement.

"Chief Sharp!" called the young fire captain. "Run these two bad characters outside the lines!"

Jason Sharp made a dive for the rascally pair, but Sliney and Rack fled promptly, getting outside the fire lines.

"Hully smoke!" muttered Sliney to his friend. "Dat was the new fire captain we tackled last night!"

The Vanes were out and across the street. Dick counted them swiftly—Mr. and Mrs. Vane, Faith, and the latter's young sister Clara.

The Vane servants, three in number, were with them.

But just as Dick shot his swift look their way, Faith, uttering a shriek, started across to our hero, pointing upward.

Dick turned, and the blood seemed, for an instant, to freeze in his veins.

At a window on the third and topmost floor appeared the beautiful face of Kitty Lester.

She did not cry out. Indeed, she seemed weak, as though she had been groping her way through heat and smoke.

Captain Halstead's resolution was taken in an instant.

He saw the flames breaking out on the second story, then turned just in time to see Tom Scott's hook and ladder men coming forward with the ladder for which he had asked.

"Drop it in the street," shouted Captain Dick, through his trumpet. "Run off the longest ladder in the quickest time you can do it. There is a life to be saved!"

Tom Scott and his men leaped to obey.

Dick ran to the edge of the sidewalk, turning his trumpet aloft.

"Don't be afraid, Miss Lester," he shouted up. "We'll have you down all right, in a jiffy!"

As the hook-and-ladder men came rushing with the ladder, Fred Parsons, standing just outside the lines, spoke hurriedly to a policeman and darted inside.

"Run the ladder up to that window!" shouted Dick, hoarsely, and the men obeyed as fast as they could.

"Who's going up?" demanded Scott, huskily.

"I am," Dick answered, intrepidly.

As the ladder was placed, Dick seized the rungs.

"No, you don't!" screamed Parsons. "Get away from there. It's a man's job! Kitty Lester's life is at stake."

"I know it," replied Dick, thickly. "Let go of me."

"Not——"

But Dick shook Fred free, fairly hurling him at Chief Jason.

"Chief, this young man is obstructing the department's work. Put him out of the lines."



Chief Jason lost not a second, but pounced upon Fred, wheeling him and running him down the street.

But of this Dick saw nothing.

Grasping the sides of the ladder, he was already half way up.

Flame belched out at him as he ran past the second story.

Great billows of smoke threatened to engulf and strangle him.

But, keeping his mouth tightly closed, Dick fought upward through it, moving as nimbly as a circus acrobat.

As he sprang at the sill, he saw Kitty reel and step backward.

"Here, none of that, please, Miss Lester!" he called.

He leaped through the window.

Kitty stood gasping, one hand held over her heart, quite unable, for the moment, to move.

"This is no place to dally!" cried Dick, forcing a laugh. "Come! Don't move or speak! Just give yourself up to me and let me get you out of here!"

He felt Kitty's limp figure close to his own as he appeared at the window, his left arm around her waist, her own arms around his neck.

A whirl, and he was out on the sill, stepping to the ladder.

"We're mighty lucky if we get down through this!" he throbbed, inwardly, as he glanced below.

For his glance told him what Kitty had not seen—that the ladder was afire and blazing furiously, despite Hal Norton directing the stream fairly against it.

Captain Dick's heart was in his mouth—for Kitty Lester's sweet sake—not for his own!

## CHAPTER V.

### OF SUCH STUFF ARE FIREMEN MADE.

Yet not one word of Dick's frantic worry came into his voice as he said:

"Just hold on tightly, Miss Lester. We're going down to safety!"

But from below came frenzied voices sending warning of overhanging disaster.

Crackle! Whirr-rr! Thump!

That ladder, their possible path to safety, fell to the street, two blazing sections.

As the burning ladder broke, and Young Wide Awake's quick-witted, mighty effort swung Kitty to safety on the ledge of the window, both gazed, shudderingly, at the sheet of flame below.

"We can't escape now!" gasped the girl.

"We must and will!" Young Wide Awake staunchly retorted.

Young Wide Awake? Yes!

He was thus christened then and there.

For, at his swift, splendid performance in getting clear of the wrecked ladder, Hal Norton had shouted, hoarsely, joyfully:

"Can't catch him! He's wide awake!"

"Sure, he's Young Wide Awake his very self!" bellowed Terry Rourke, admiringly. "That's who he is!"

That name, bestowed upon him at his first fire, always clung to Dick Halstead.

Not more than two or three seconds did our hero spend in looking the situation in the face.

Then he appealed to the girl.

"Miss Lester, can you stand here, holding on to the sill just long enough to give me a chance to get back into the room?"

"Yes," she answered, at once.

"You won't get dizzy and fall?"

"Do you think me a baby, Captain Halstead?"

Dick did not answer in words, but drew himself up over the sill and into the room out of which he had just drawn Kitty.

Then, like a flash, he wheeled.

Uttering no word, he seized her under the shoulders.

Bracing his feet against the base-board, he pulled her quickly back into the room.

"Back where we started," she uttered, looking at him with an anxious smile.

Yet her own great danger was not, at this instant, uppermost in her mind.

She was thinking what a pity it was that so splendid a young fireman should be sacrificed in the hopeless task of getting her out of her peril of death.

"I don't like the looks of your eyes," he muttered in her ear. "I'm afraid you're going to faint from the smoke. I've got to carry you."

The words were uttered as if they were an apology.

Then both of Young Wide Awake's arms passed around her, lifting her clear of the floor.

With his precious, unresisting burden, Captain Halstead raced out of the room.

He carried her into a rear room, but here the smoke was even more dense.

There was no chance of escape from the rear.

"Where are the windows fronting on Holmes Street?" he panted, desperately.

"There are no real windows on that side," murmured the girl, drowsily, as if falling asleep. "They're blind windows—for show only."

With that her head sunk limply against his face, stirring Young Wide Awake to despairing swiftness of action.

Only one glance at the stairs had been needed to show them that they could not possibly get down that way.

There was but one chance left—the roof.

Luckily, Dick quickly found the stairs leading to a scuttle.

He dashed up those stairs, closing the door behind him to keep the smoke back.

Out upon the roof he stepped, still holding Kitty in his arms.

But he ran to a chimney, depositing the girl, in sitting position, with her back against the chimney.



Off with his helmet!

He fanned her briskly, feverishly, in that purer, clearer air.

In a few seconds he saw Kitty open her eyes and smile at him faintly.

"Don't let the smoke overcome you—don't dare to!" he called, sharply, hauling her to her feet. "Walk about and take in deep breaths. It's the only way to clear your lungs. There! You're all right now for a few seconds. I must find the way to get us out of this."

He ran to the Holmes Street side of the house, the side on which the blind windows had shut them off from ladder escape.

It was no use turning to the opposite side of the house, for there the nearest building was more than twenty feet away, and had a pitch roof, to which no escape could be made, even by means of bridging ladders.

As Dick gazed down into Holmes Street the first person he saw was Chief Pelton, just arrived.

"Chief!" Young Wide Awake bawled down.

"Oh, aye, lad!" bellowed back Chief Pelton, discovering Dick.

"Have you got another long ladder?"

"Not one that'll reach you where you are."

"Then, see here——"

Dick's hand had come across a forgotten ball of stout twine in one of his pockets.

"Get hold of this!" our hero shouted down, taking a tight grip on one end of the string, then tossing the ball down into the street.

"Fasten that to a rope's end and I'll pull up the rope," Dick called down. "Then you can rig the swing tackle to the end of the rope. Quick, chief, for the smoke's reaching us!"

Chief Pelton was a man who could work like lightning.

Hardly had Young Wide Awake explained what he wanted when a rope's end was made fast.

Swiftly Halstead drew in the slack of the string. He now had a slight but strong rope in hand.

"Tie the tackle on to the other end," he bawled down.

This was swiftly done.

"Can't I help, Captain Halstead?"

It was the voice of Kitty Lester, just behind him.

"For heaven's sake fall back, Miss Lester," he answered, hoarsely. "If you should topple over the edge of the roof I'd feel like jumping after you, down to death. Fall back!"

Kitty silently obeyed, compelled by the presence of Young Wide Awake, who, in moments of great peril, had the knack of making others obey him.

Frantically Dick worked at the rope until he had the tackle up on the roof.

This was an ingenious affair, patented by Chief Pelton for just such emergencies.

It consisted of a set of ropes with pulley tackle, and enough rope at the upper end to make a secure bight over a chimney.

Below the pulley tackle was a swing seat, broad enough for two people to sit on it.

By means of a rope running to the pulley, one of the persons on the swing seat could lower both down to safety.

Young Wide Awake darted past the eager-eyed girl, passing the rope around the chimney.

"We'll soon be safe, sure enough!" he called to her, as he knotted the safety rope swiftly, but several times. "Now, all we've got to do, Miss Lester, is to take a ride down to safety."

Kitty stood looking on in wonder, but asked no questions.

"You'll trust me, won't you, Miss Lester?" Dick asked, stepping up to her.

"Trust you?"

The girl's whole soul welled up into her admiring eyes as she gazed at this cool, intrepid young fireman who seemed to know the meaning neither of fear nor despair.

"I want to tie your hands tightly," said Young Wide Awake, smilingly.

It thrilled him to the core to see how promptly and unquestioningly Kitty Lester held out her trim little hands to him.

"Don't mind if I tie a bit tight," he urged, as he whipped out a big handkerchief and tied, twisted and knotted it until he had her wrists securely joined together.

Kitty must have wondered, greatly, what he meant to do, but she did not speak.

"What can I do?"

Dick turned with a start, just as he had finished securing the girl's wrists.

A small boy, a very small boy he seemed beside our hero, stood at their side.

It was Ted Lester, a little orphaned cousin of Kitty's, whom Mr. Lester had taken into his own home.

"How on earth did you get up here?" gasped Young Wide Awake.

"Shinned up," returned Ted, drily.

"Shinned up—what?"

"Your rope rigging," Ted replied, looking at each in turn, and thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets.

"Shinned up from the street?" insisted Young Wide Awake, amazed.

"Yep."

"Didn't any one stop you?"

"They tried to," replied Ted, not disconcerted a bit.

"But I was half way up by the time they yelled to me to come back. I didn't go back."

"Ted, you young mischief!" cried Kitty, reproachfully. "Now Captain Halstead has more of us to rescue."

"I'm equal to it," smiled Young Wide Awake.

"See here," blurted Ted. "I didn't come up here to do any baby act. I came up to help you, Kit."

"Of course you did!" cried Dick, with a swift pat on the wrathful little fellow's shoulder.

Then our hero ran to the edge of the roof, working his ropes and tackle until he had the swing at the edge of the roof and everything in working order.



The lowering rope Dick made quickly fast to the swing seat, so that it would not work until he was ready for it.

Then he turned to the girl.

"Now, Miss Lester, I'm ready for you."

Kitty came speedily forward.

"Watch that she doesn't pitch over when she does what I ask of her," begged Halstead, turning to Ted.

Dick seated himself on the board seat of the swing at one side.

"Now, Miss Lester, lean forward and put your fastened hands over my head."

Now Kitty understood at once why Young Wide Awake had tied her hands together.

With her arms around his neck, thus, she would be sure to hold on to him, no matter if dizziness or smoke deprived her of her senses.

Ted held stoutly to his cousin as Kitty passed herself to a seat on the swing.

Young Wide Awake passed one arm around her waist in such fashion that he could grip with both hands at the lowering rope.

Down below the firemen and the crowd watched with breathless interest.

Dick quickly had the lowering rope free.

Thanks to the arrangement of pulley tackle, he could lower without great strain on his arms.

With a light-hearted laugh he kicked the swing seat free of the building and paid out rope.

"Back for you in a few seconds, young man," our hero cried to Ted, who, his hands still in his pockets, stood calmly watching.

"Oh, just send up the old seat for me. That'll be enough," responded Ted Lester, coolly.

How the crowd cheered as Dick slowly and securely lowered them both to safety.

But Dick, swiftly setting Miss Lester free of him, passed the control rope to three or four firemen near.

"Haul me up again," he begged. "I've got to make sure that that young madcap up there gets down all right."

"You needn't come up," bawled Master Ted, with all the scorn of his fourteen years of life. "Just send the rig."

But Dick was hauled to the roof, where he took Master Ted on to the seat beside him—and held on to him—and both thus reached the street in safety.

"S'pose I ought to say 'thanks,'" grumbled Master Ted, as his feet touched the street. "But I don't like being rescued, like a baby, or a girl!"

John Lester, who had just reached the scene and stood with one shaking arm thrown around his pale-faced daughter, now left her, rushing forward to our hero.

"Halstead——" began the old man, huskily.

"No time to talk now, sir," returned Dick, springing away from him. "I've got my company to look after."

Torrent One, which had just arrived, was playing furiously against the rear of the Vane mansion.

Dick raced around into Ellis Street, to look after the work of his own Washington One.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE INSTANT OF SICKENING DREAD.

Though the Vane mansion seemed doomed, it was not wholly so.

Thanks to the second alarm, and the prompt arrival of Torrent One to help Washington One, and thanks, especially, to the swift, skilled direction of Chief Pelton, the fire, after twenty minutes more, was gotten under control.

Another fifteen minutes after that and the last vestige of fire was out.

The mansion had been badly damaged, but still it could be repaired at half the cost of rebuilding it.

Dripping with perspiration, despite the sharp, cold air of the day, the firemen, boys and men alike, came back to their machines.

Chief Pelton strode over to Young Wide Awake.

"Halstead," he said, in his great, hearty voice, so that all might hear, "I want to commend you on some of the neatest, best work I've ever seen done at a fire. And this applies to the members of your company as well. Washington One, from captain down, has well earned its way into Belmont's fire department."

"Three cheers, all, for Washington One!" roared Tom Scott.

The cheers seemed fairly to volley out.

Fred Parsons, now on the spot again, since the fire line had been broken, heard and felt sick at soul.

"All this fuss about that cub!" he grumbled.

Then he started to walk toward Mr. Lester and the latter's daughter.

But they, preceded by Ted, had started toward Dick, and Parsons fell back with another snort of rage.

"Now I can speak to you, Halstead!" cried Mr. Lester, leaping forward and pouncing upon our hero's right hand, while the old man's other hand rested on one of the young fireman's shoulders. "Yes, you have time to listen to me now, lad—but I don't seem to know what to say."

John Lester's voice choked, his eyes filled with tears.

"You don't quite know what you've done for two old people," quavered Mr. Lester. "Some day, Halstead, I shall hope to be able to make you understand. But this I can say, now: If there's any way on earth that I can properly show my great debt of gratitude to you, I shall show it to you as soon as the knowledge reaches me. Here or elsewhere, now and always, Halstead, you will find John Lester your friend!"

Dick, instead of being pleased, found his face growing red under all this warm praise.

"Mr. Lester," he answered, trying to laugh off his embarrassment, "I thank you for your kind words; but I'm afraid, sir, you'll make the other members of the department feel like laughing at me if you make so much of a simple act of a fireman's duty."

"Perhaps you will know how to thank him better, Kitty," urged her father, in a broken voice, as he turned to his daughter.



Kitty held out her hand, gently.

Young Wide Awake enveloped it in his own.

"Just this much, Miss Lester, and not a word," urged Dick. "I'm in your debt, now, Miss Lester."

As if to hide his own embarrassment, Mr. Lester wheeled upon his young nephew.

"As for you, Ted, I'm afraid you almost deserve a spanking for the reckless way you went up to that roof on the ropes."

"I wanted to help Kit," retorted Ted, stoutly.

"Of course you did," replied Mr. Lester, more softly.

"Bless you, lad, of course you did."

Then, again turning toward our hero, Mr. Lester added, smilingly:

"But it seems, Ted, that Kitty was quite safe in better hands than yours. You're not quite a fireman."

"No, I ain't," agreed Ted, disappointedly. "Lord, but I wish I was."

"You ought to be," spoke Dick, heartily, as he rested a hand on Master Ted's shoulder. "You've got all the nerve of a fireman—and some to spare."

"Then take me into your company!" dared Ted, eagerly.

"By the great ladder, I would if I could!" vowed Dick.

He turned toward Mr. Lester, adding:

"That is, of course, if your uncle is willing."

"Oh, he'll be willing—soon, if not now," promised Ted, eagerly. "Say, can't you take me into the crew of Washington One?"

"There is one vacancy," spoke Young Wide Awake, thoughtfully. "Fred Parsons' resignation leaves a chance for some one. How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"Too bad," sighed Dick. "The city council's ordinance says no boy under fifteen can join."

"Oh, we can get the law changed," proposed Ted, recklessly.

"As much to please the youngster as anything, Dick turned to Mr. Pelton.

"Chief, if there is any way to bring it about, it will be a great favor to me if young Lester can be allowed to come into Washington One. He's worth being one of our company."

"Say, that's what I call bully! Thank you!" glowed Ted.

Then, seeing that Chief Pelton was moving away, Ted caught hold of one of the chief's arms and left the spot with him.

Recall having been sounded, it was time to take the machines back to their several houses.

As it would be some weeks ere the Vanes could occupy their own home again, Mr. Lester took them at once to his own big home.

But Terry had a chance to slip in a few words with Faith Vane ere the call of duty took him away with Washington's hose-cart.

An hour later many of the young firemen still lingered at the Washington home.

The apparatus had been snugly put away, but the young fire fighters were discussing their work with all the enthusiasm that a new game arouses in most minds.

Then a carriage belonging to John Lester drew up before the fire house, and a man servant stepped out.

"Captain Halstead?" asked this messenger.

"Here," said Young Wide Awake, stepping forward.

"Mr. Lester's compliments, Captain Halstead, and he begs that yourself and the other officers of this fire company will do him the great favor to come out to his house at once and dine to-night with his family and the Vanes."

Dick fairly gasped, then turned to Hal, Joe and Terry. The latter's eyes at once showed the readiest acceptance of the invitation.

"We will accept Mr. Lester's very kind invitation with the greatest pleasure," Young Wide Awake announced.

"Then the carriage is waiting, captain, to take you to your homes in case you wish to dress."

Dick and his chums, amid pleased murmurs from most of the other young firemen, went out and seated themselves in the carriage, the Lester servant getting up on the box with the driver.

Something more than an hour later the carriage, with the four young Washingtons, each carefully dressed in his best, turned in at the gateway of the great, handsome estate of John Lester.

This estate, which covered some forty acres of ground, was just out at the town edge of the suburbs.

John Lester, who had been notified by telephone to expect his guests, received them in the drawing-room, just off from the main corridor of the house.

With him was Mrs. Lester, a slender, sweet-faced, white-haired woman.

She had never met any of the young men before, so this was her first opportunity of thanking them, and Young Wide Awake especially.

Then Mr. and Mrs. Vane moved forward, joining in the thanks, not only for the firemen's deeds of the afternoon, but for the rescue of the two girls from the terrors of the night before.

"You're wondering where the young ladies are, I know," smiled Mr. Lester. "We advised Kitty to go off on a horse-back ride, to steady her nerves and fill her lungs with good air, and Faith rode with her. Neither of the young ladies know that we have you here. It will be a pleasant surprise for them."

"I've never seen the young ladies ride," remarked Dick.

"Then you must all go out and greet them when we hear them coming," proposed Mr. Lester.

"Oh, good evening all!" greeted Master Ted, looking in at the door, and then going straight up to Young Wide Awake. "Say," murmured the youngster, "I'm laying pipes to get my pull fixed so I can join the Washingtons! I've got two city councilmen already, and——"

"That will be enough for the present, young man," warned Mr. Lester, smilingly.

Soon the sound of cantering hoofs was heard outside.



"Here come the young ladies," announced Mr. Lester, and moved toward the outside door, the fire boys and Ted following.

But when they got out on the veranda they found only Faith Vane.

"Where's Kitty?" hailed her father, anxiously. "There hasn't been any accident?"

"Oh, no, sir; but Sultan is cranky to-day, and Kitty is giving him a last swift run to take some of the fire out of the unruly beast," Faith answered, as she reined up.

Terry sprang forward to give her a hand down, while Dick stepped to the horse's head to hold the bridle.

"This looks like an animal with some fire," remarked Dick.

"Do you ride, Captain Halstead?" asked Faith.

"Every chance I get, which isn't often," laughed Dick.

"You're fond of riding?" asked Mr. Lester.

"It's a passion with me," Dick answered.

"Mount that animal and try a spin, if you like."

Dick looked his pleasure at the suggestion.

As Faith had been riding astride, it was necessary only for our hero to lengthen the stirrup straps.

Then he sprang to a seat on the horse, and rode at a gallop along the driveways.

As he was riding thus he saw Kitty coming. Sultan was certainly behaving at his worst, rearing, plunging, bolting.

But Kitty Lester held her mount with as firm a hand as she could, veering the beast sharply at the gate.

Then something—the sight of so many people ahead, perhaps, startled the nervous animal.

With a snort and a great leap, Sultan took the bit in his teeth and tore down the driveway.

In vain Kitty tried to stop the maddened animal.

"Stop! Stop, in heaven's name!" gasped Mr. Lester. "That brute will carry you into the grove and dash you to pulp among the trees!"

Dick had seen Sultan's start just in time to veer the other horse out of Sultan's path.

The maddened animal, with white-faced Kitty in the saddle, dashed by like a streak of light.

"That brute will kill her!" throbbed Mr. Lester, his face whiter than his imperiled daughter's.

"It's all right!" cheered Master Ted, joyously. "There goes Dick Halstead after Sultan!"

As Sultan, now unruled and unchecked, made a dash straight at the maze of the grove, Young Wide Awake was seen digging his heels hard into the flanks of the other horse.

He rode desperately in Kitty's wake, his teeth hard set, his face deathly pale.

After him dashed on foot the agonized spectators of the fearful scene.

Faith having not ridden her horse as hard, the animal was in better condition for speed than was Sultan.

Otherwise, the race would have been most equal.

There were but two hundred yards of space left between Sultan and the grove.

If the maddened brute ran in under the trees he would be sure to dash his fair young rider off against the low-hanging limbs.

Indeed, the girl would almost certainly be horribly mangled.

Kitty Lester looked as if she were about to leap from the saddle.

Yet such a flight from the saddle was almost sure to result in her death.

"Don't leap!" shouted Young Wide Awake, hoarsely.

That commanding voice, which once before to-day she had obeyed with safety, kept her from springing from the saddle.

Digging his heels still harder into the flanks of Faith Vane's horse, Dick gained and gained on Sultan's wild pace.

Then, in a thrilling instant, Dick rode so close that the flanks of the two horses touched.

Bound! Dick was out of the saddle and across Sultan's back.

It was a feat that required cool courage even much more than mere skill.

His left arm clasped the girl's waist.

"Keep perfectly cool," he begged in her ear. "Take your feet out of the stirrups. Trust to me. I'm going to pull you from the saddle."

With blind faith the frightened girl obeyed, but the wrench on his arm was terrible.

"We're going under that limb! Duck low!" sounded Dick's sharp, warning voice.

As Kitty crouched low, and they neared the tree and its low-hanging boughs, Young Wide Awake yanked on the reins.

Just as they neared the low-hanging bough, Young Wide Awake pulled in the quivering beast.

Sultan paused.

Then Dick Halstead prepared to dismount, clasping Kitty Lester in his arms.

He dropped lightly to his feet, holding Kitty clear of the ground, and the horse crashed against a tree.

Next he permitted her to sink to her feet.

For the life of him he could not resist the temptation to give her one quick squeeze toward him before he released her.

But Kitty Lester never even noticed the act.

"For a moment I was mighty scared about you, Miss Lester," laughed Young Wide Awake, coolly.

"What a splendid act that was," glowed Kitty. "And you're trying to make light of your splendid work again."

## CHAPTER VII.

### DICK SHOWS WHAT REAL MEN ARE LIKE.

As young Wide Awake rode he had but one desperate plan in his mind—the only one that seemed possible.



She pouted, as if highly displeased, but Dick only laughed coolly.

"Let's walk back toward the folks," he hinted. "They'll feel easier when they see that you can walk."

"Let me take your arm," begged the girl. "I feel a bit dizzy."

"Not that one, please," said Dick, quickly, but quietly, as he drew back from her hand that sought his right arm.

Kitty stared at him in sudden pity and anxiety.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing," he replied, simply.

"With your right arm, then, I mean."

"Why, that arm has just had a bit of hard work. Take the other arm, won't you, Miss Lester?"

"Your right arm is badly hurt!" she cried, trembling.

"It's nothing, Miss Lester. It's all right."

"You poor, poor fellow!" Kitty almost sobbed, as she slipped around to his other side.

She took his left arm, trying to support him rather than herself.

"Oh, Halstead!" panted Mr. Lester, running up, gasping, just behind the boys.

"It wasn't anything," said Dick, quietly. "Please don't say anything about it."

"No, don't say anything," begged Kitty. "The poor, splendid fellow is in great torment, I fear."

That announcement stilled all tongues.

Everyone turned, following Kitty, as she insisted on leading Dick toward the house.

Sultan lay in the grove, with a split skull, breathing out the last of his wild life.

But no one thought of Sultan, nor of Faith's horse, loose somewhere in the grove.

They got Dick into the house, he protesting that he had met with no other mishap than a wrenching of some of the shoulder ligaments.

John Lester telephoned for a physician, who came, took Dick into another room, followed by Hal, Joe, and Terry, and gave the right arm a close examination.

"Nothing broken, but it was a fearful wrench!" explained Dr. Strong to Mr. Lester, who had slipped in after the boys.

"It isn't going to cripple young Halstead?" asked Kitty's father.

"Not if the young man takes care of his arm," answered the surgeon.

"Pshaw! I'll be able to box with that arm in the morning," laughed Dick.

Dr. Strong looked him sharply in the eyes.

"Halstead, if you try to use this arm any in the next week, you're likely to carry a lamed and weakened arm through life. A week's rest, mind you!"

"I'll have him taken home at once," cried Mr. Lester. "Unless Halstead will consent to stay here and be taken care of."

"I won't, thank you," said Young Wide Awake, prompt-

ly. "But how about this evening? I thought I was invited here to dinner?"

"Can he stay to dinner, doctor?" asked Mr. Lester, anxiously.

"Yes, if he can stand the pain, and doesn't use his injured arm," responded Dr. Strong.

"Stand the pain?" echoed Halstead. "There isn't much of any to stand. Dr. Strong, if you'll help me to get my shirt on again, and one of the fellows will help me to finish dressing, I'll go back to the others. They'll be thinking that I'm really hurt."

Everyone at the Lester house, however, preferred to take the surgeon's word as to the torment that Young Wide Awake was suffering.

Not once, however, did Dick allude to it.

As they started in to dinner, Kitty Lester slipped to our hero's side.

"I'm going to sit at your right side," she explained, "and make sure that you don't try to use your right hand for anything."

Finding that Young Wide Awake preferred to have his mishap ignored, and that he found the most pleasure in jollity, the dinner soon became one of the merriest affairs imaginable.

Yet, through it all, Kitty, with a laugh on her lips, but anxiety in her beautiful eyes, watched Dick Halstead as closely as a mother watches a sick child.

The fine meal over at last, all hands moved back to the drawing-room.

They had not been seated there long, chatting and jesting, when a servant entered, handing a card to Miss Kitty.

She glanced at it, excused herself, and stepped out into the broad hallway.

Fred Parsons, hat in hand, stepped eagerly toward her.

"I hope you won't be disappointed, Fred," she said, sweetly, holding out her hand. "The truth is I—I am engaged this evening."

Just then Mr. Lester, inside, addressed Young Wide Awake by name, and Parsons' brow darkened.

"Oh, I understand," he returned, sneeringly. "I see who your company is. You're entertaining that cheeky young ragamuffin——"

"Of whom are you speaking?" interrupted Kitty, warmly.

"Oh, that fellow that the fools in town are calling Young Wide Awake. He's as poor as Job's turkey."

"Poverty is something that some men can get out of without the help of others," Kitty retorted.

"Oh, he'll make your father help him out of his poverty, see if he doesn't," proposed Fred.

"He has refused any reward for what he has done," Kitty informed her black-browed young admirer. "He has asked us, as a favor, to say nothing more about his splendid deeds."

"Oh, of course," jeered Parsons, loftily. "That's the way those cheeky young beggars always work the game. They're all alike."



"Fred," returned Kitty, with dignity, "I thought that you would take the hint, and I didn't like to ask you bluntly to go."

"You'll learn a lot before you're through with this gallery god, Young Wide Awake," sneered Fred, as he buttoned up his overcoat.

"I'm learning already," answered Miss Lester, simply.

"Learning?" Fred eyed her sharply. "What are you learning?"

"I am beginning to learn how real manly fellows conduct themselves," Miss Kitty replied, meaningly.

Parson's brow flushed again.

Then, becoming wary, for he feared that his hold on this spirited girl's regard might not be as strong as he could wish, he held out his hand, saying, more softly and gently:

"Good-night, Kitty, since you command it. And, since I am to be banished to-night, may I presume to call to-morrow evening?"

"I think we shall be out to-morrow evening," was the girl's answer.

"Then when can I hope to see you?"

"Why, you can use the telephone, Fred, at any time when you wish to know whether I am going to be at home."

"Whether you are going to be at home to me," corrected her admirer.

Then he sighed, trying to look romantic.

"There was a time, Kitty, when you seemed glad to have me call."

"I am always glad to see you, Fred. Only—please don't backbite my friends."

"Backbite?" queried Parsons, starting as if from a shock.

"Backbiting doesn't seem manly, you know," Kitty went on, sweetly. "And, as I warned you, I am beginning to get some insight into what real, manly character is. I want to believe in your manliness, Fred. Good-night."

Young Mr. Parsons found himself on the other side of the door with almost surprising speed.

"So Dick Halstead is calling, and keeping the door locked on me?" he grated, as he trudged home over the frozen ground. "I like that—I don't think! And Mistress Kitty is beginning to point out to me certain things about me that she doesn't like! Comparing me with young Wide Awake, and in his favor, at that!"

"Master Dick Halstead, I've got a big bone to pick with you, I'm afraid," grated Parsons, as he walked angrily homeward. "I'm not used to playing second part to paupers in your class."

The merriest evening that any of the young fire fighters had ever spent was that evening at the Lesters'.

Young Wide Awake enjoyed it to the full, despite the twinges that his outraged arm gave him.

The next morning, to his great disgust, Dick found that his arm was much worse.

He lost two days from the High School and was also

forced to obey Dr. Strong's order about no fire duty for a week.

During that week Hal Norton was in command of Washington No. 1, and even had the satisfaction of commanding the boys at one trifling fire in the cellar under a store.

In that week, Master Ted Lester, Kitty's impulsive young cousin, made good his brag about getting out his "political pull."

By dragging his influential uncle into the matter, Ted actually did get the City Council to authorize his joining Washington One.

Ted Lester, the youngest, and the pet of the company, was sworn into the fire department of Belmont on the very day that Young Wide Awake returned to active duty as captain.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MISCHIEF SET AFOOT.

The ground was covered with some two feet of snow, save where the sidewalks had been shoveled off and the roads broken out.

Belmont and the surrounding towns were enjoying one of the winter's cold spells, accompanied by some of the season's best sleighing.

Fred Parsons had driven in a cutter, behind one of his father's best horses, to ask Miss Kitty to take a drive with him.

But at the house he was told that Miss Lester and Miss Vane were already out behind one of the Lester teams.

He had called three times since Young Wide Awake's memorable visit to the Lester home.

On each of these occasions Fred had been received by Kitty as if nothing had happened.

She was as gracious, smiling, and pleasant with him as she had ever been.

More than that, Parsons knew, from adroit questioning, that Young Wide Awake had not made another call.

Once, Kitty and her mother had stopped at the High School gate, just as the boys were coming out.

They had chatted with Dick, and had asked about his arm.

"Unless he develops an awful lot of nerve, he won't call there again," growled Fred, as he drove into Belmont. "For a while I thought Halstead was my hoodoo. First, he cut me out of the captaincy of Washington One; then it looked as if my girl was going to side with him against me; but I guess things are running pretty smoothly again."

Reaching town, Parsons reined up before the bank building, hitching the horse.

He went down the side street, and up a side stairway to his father's office.

Not finding his father in, Fred came downstairs again.

He had just gained the corner of Main Street when he halted, dismayed at the sight that met his eyes.

The Lester sleigh, a big affair, with two seats facing



each other behind the coachman's seat, was drawn up at the curb.

Miss Faith on the front seat and Miss Kitty on the rear seat!

That, in itself, was all right enough—but their company!

Both of the girls, with glowing faces and eyes shining with enjoyment, were talking to Dick Halstead and Terry Rourke, who stood at the curb beside the sleigh!

"Is this a nightmare? Am I awake?" gasped Parsons, drawing back into the shadow of the corner. "Confound Halstead! Can't he leave my girl alone? And is she going all to the impossible—flirting with a cub like that?"

Just a moment later Parsons felt sure that he must be dreaming.

For Young Wide Awake, after smiling and lifting his hat, stepped into the seat beside Miss Kitty, who made a good deal of fixing the big fur robe just right.

At the same time, Terry, his eyes shining with delight, got in beside Miss Faith Vane.

"Shure, 'tis heaven this is!" murmured the gallant Terry to Miss Vane. "If it's dreaming Oi am, d'ye want to know me wish, Miss Faith?"

"Your wish, Mr. Rourke?"

"May the inimy niver know peace again that raps on me door whilst Oi'm dreaming this dream."

The girls laughed merrily as the coachman swung his whip and started the lively steppers off down the street.

So absorbed were the four young people that they whizzed by Parsons with never a look in his direction.

"Dick Halstead, you cheekiest of beggars!" cried Fred, in a rage.

Though he did not realize it, he was talking aloud in his passion.

"Oh, I've got an account to settle with you, Dick Halstead!"

"Whist!"

The sharp hiss startled Fred.

He turned quickly around, to find himself looking into the blinking, cunning eyes of Mr. Sliney Gamp.

"Fine day, Mr. Parsons," grinned Gamp, while Mr. Rack Evans slunk in the rear of his leader and elder.

"Mind your business!" retorted Fred, sharply.

"That's me specialty, boss," observed Sliney, coolly.

"Stick to it, then," retorted Fred, and was about to move away from the tough, when Gamp announced:

"From noticin' which way the wind blows, I thought maybe I could do you a good turn."

"What can you possibly have to say that could interest me?" demanded Fred Parsons, looking the tough over with a glance that was eloquent of distrust and disgust.

"I had something to say that I thought might interest you, boss," persisted Sliney.

"Nothing that would interest you could possibly interest me," retorted Fred, grandly.

"Not even if it was about that unwhiskered goat that folks calls Young Wide Awake?"

Parsons bit at the bait in an instant.

"What about him?" he asked, curiously.

"Oh, you see, boss, you was wrong!" exulted Sliney. "Well, I can tell you a good bit about Young Wide Awake if you're interested enough to listen."

"What, for instance?"

"Come down this side street a bit," coaxed Mr. Gamp.

Fred, after a quick look around him, decided that if he were to talk with this pair it would be much better not to do it on Main Street.

So he followed Sliney and Rack a few yards down from the corner.

"Now?" he demanded, halting.

"You don't like Young Wide Awake?" demanded Sliney.

"What of it?"

"Neither do we," declared Gamp.

"Oh! It is a great pleasure to find gentlemen like you of the same mind as myself," sneered Fred.

"You'd like to see things happen to Young Wide Awake."

"What things?"

"Mebbe you'd like to see him done for," suggested Sliney, cunningly.

"See here, fellow, what are you driving at?" demanded Parsons. "Talk up fast, and to the point, or I'm going to leave you. Don't beat about the bush for a single second."

"Well, see here, then," hinted Sliney, while Rack drew closer and looked on in eager silence, "you're a young gent what has a papa that gives him spending money. Now, you pay us for the job and we'll swear to fix Young Wide Awake so that he won't bother you none after this."

"Let me see if I understand you," half choked Fred Parsons. "You fellows evidently think I have some money to spare. If I hand it over to you, you two agree to play the part of thugs, and all but kill Dick Halstead? Is that it?"

"You're certainly getting close, boss," agreed Sliney, with a wide grin.

"Then that's about all there is to be said, I guess," rejoined Fred, stiffly.

Out of the corner of his eye young Parsons had seen Chief of Police Jason Sharp saunter by on the other side of the street, looking sharply at the trio.

"Ye don't mean to say ye ain't going to bite?" gasped Sliney, his grin fading.

"If I've got anything against that fellow Halstead," retorted Fred, stiffly, "I'll settle it in my own way by giving him rope enough to hang himself with."

"And he'll hang your girl in the same noose wid himself, eh, boss?" grinned Sliney, maliciously.

Parsons would have struck Sliney, but there were two of them. So he turned on his heel, white and shaking, rounded the corner and made for his cutter, driving off, with a savage frown on his brow.

"Faded, didn't it?" asked Mr. Rack Evans, regretfully.

"Not a bit of it," whispered the other tough, cheerfully.

"Now, we go ahead and cook up our own dish for Young Wide Awake. Afterwards we make Boss Parsons pay any



price we name. If he kicks, we'll tell him we're going to confess and say he hired us to do the job, see? He'll pay up in big shape, then! 'Cause he saw Chief Sharp lookin' our way, and Boss Parsons will be afraid that the chief will think he saw all three of us putting up de job! Oh, dis is a cinch for Parsons' wad and Young Wide Awake's scalp!" wound up Sliney Gamp, joyfully.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE BLOW OUT OF THE SKY.

At ten o'clock in the morning, recitations were in full blast at the Belmont High School.

"Dick Halstead," called the teacher in geometry.

Dick stood up to recite.

"Halstead, you may——"

Clang!

With just one swift look at the instructor, Dick dashed from the room.

He was followed by four other youngsters in the same class.

From other rooms others darted out, all making a break for the coat-room.

Downstairs the fire boys dashed.

"A steady dog-trot, and you'll keep your wind longer!" called Young Wide Awake over his shoulder.

Two corners up they were joined by boys from the factories and the stores.

As he ran, Dick had counted the alarm.

It was the call to the engine house.

"This may be only a trial for discipline," thought Young Wide Awake, but he kept the same speed, neither more nor less.

In a straggling line they reached the fire house.

Before the building sat Chief Pelton in his buggy.

Dick being the first to arrive, the chief bent over to speak to him.

"Captain Halstead, a telephone call has come in from Anderson's, in Crawford. You know where the place is?"

"Yes, chief."

"One of his smaller stables is afire—at least, the hay is smouldering there, and smouldering hay is one of the hardest things to put out. There is danger that the fire will spread to the larger outbuildings and stables. If it does, the way the wind is blowing, the main house may catch. Get your company out there as soon as you can. I shall drive on ahead, with dynamite, and see if anything can be done by blowing up the stable. We shall need you on the jump, captain!"

"We won't lose a second on the way, chief!" promised Young Wide Awake, crisply.

Clanging his gong, Chief Pelton drove away almost at a gallop.

"Get into your togs and run the machines out!" shouted Young Wide Awake.

Then, while he drew on his own boots, rubber coat and helmet, Dick gave them the route.

"Hurry the machines out there!" cried the young captain, himself giving a hand at the pole of Washington One.

With a rush, Belmont's fire boys responded.

"Steady dog-trot, all the way, if you can!" shouted Young Wide Awake, through his trumpet, as he allowed the machines to whizz by him. "Don't fall out, either, if you can help it!"

Then he darted on ahead of the company, catching up with Hal.

Crawford was a separate village, about a mile from Belmont.

While it had a separate town government, yet Crawford, having a population of only some eight hundred souls, and being really a suburb of Belmont, was in the same fire district by arrangement.

Having no fire crew of its own, Crawford always called on Belmont for help in times when flames raged.

Dick and Hal ran side by side, talking only when it seemed necessary.

On a long run the first duty is to save one's wind, for an exhausted fireman is of but trifling value when he reaches the scene of the fire.

The first part of their route lay along Main Street.

As they ran, people stopped to wave hats or handkerchiefs at them, for, after the performance of the other day, Belmont people knew that they had a right to feel proud of their fire boys.

In very good time they were out of town and on the straight road for Crawford.

At one point the road ran under a highway bridge at right angles.

There being a sharp trolley line turn here, Crawford people had insisted that the other road should cross above grade.

Both the young captain and the lieutenant were dripping from the exertion as they neared the bridge.

With a quick sweep, Young Wide Awake removed his helmet, running with it in his hand.

"I've been listening for the bang," muttered Hal Norton.

"What bang?" asked Dick.

"Chief Pelton's dynamite."

"He won't use that until we get there to control the spread of flames after the explosion."

"Only a little over a quarter of a mile to go."

"We'll be there in a jiffy."

Just then they darted under the edge of the bridge.

Whump! A missile fell as from the clear sky.

It struck Young Wide Awake on the head, keeling him over in a flash.

Hal Norton stopped short, gasping.

With a quick, strong effort, dragging back on their machines, the boys of Washington One came to an almost instant stop.

Then, forgetting their machines, the youngsters rushed to the spot where Young Wide Awake lay.

He was senseless, dead for all they could see to the contrary.



Blood was pouring from a gash on the back of his head. Hal, white-faced and paralyzed, bent over him.

Suddenly the young lieutenant looked up, his eyes flashing past a four-pound stone that lay close to the fallen captain.

"That fell from the bridge!" roared Hal Norton. "Terry, you and——"

He swiftly named five other members of the company, adding, at lightning speed:

"You fellows rush up on the bridge, and as much further as you have to to catch the scoundrel who threw that stone. Here—the rest of you, come back! Six are enough."

For the whole company, as soon as it came to its senses, wanted to bolt away on the chase.

"Sam!" cried Hal, turning to Bangs, "you're about winded. So you stay with Young Wide Awake. The rest of you, back to your posts. Remember, we're firemen first of all! Forward!"

Panting, Sam sat down on the cold, hard ground beside Young Wide Awake, looking at him helplessly.

Away dashed the rest of Washington One.

"Who in thunder ever did this awful thing?" gasped Slam Bangs.

Then a knowing look came into his face as he muttered:

"Fred Parsons—I'll bet the biggest feed that anybody ever sat down to!"

Within three minutes two of the fellows were back.

"Terry sent us back," they explained. "The rascal, whoever he is, got away. Terry is still on the chase, but afraid he won't catch anything."

They bent over Dick.

Not knowing what to do to bring him to, they felt at our hero's pulse, which was beating, though feebly enough.

Then came Terry and the others.

"The murdering schoundrel!" roared Terry Rourke. "He's a shmart wan, though, an' a fast wan, for we couldn't catch soight even av his shadow! How's Dick Halstead?"

Having a better idea of what to do than the others, Terry made a pile, of coats, on which he laid the unconscious young captain.

"Now, you," directed Terry, turning to one of the boys, "run to the nearest telephone for——"

At that instant he caught sight of an approaching carriage.

"We'll make thim folks take our captain," finished Terry, grimly. "Av they refuse, we'll lynch them!"

Small danger of a lynching, for, as the carriage stopped, two people thrust their heads out from inside.

One was Lawyer Gifford; the other was Dick's mother, who had gone with the lawyer to take a dying man's will from dictation.

"Oh, Mrs. Halstead!" shuddered Terry, as he helped that lady out and told her hurriedly what had happened.

Dick's mother took one good, long look at him, feeling his pulse and rolling up one of his eyelids for a look at the eye.

"Help me to get my poor son in the carriage," she said, briefly.

Then, as the carriage rolled away, bearing Young Wide Awake to the safest spot on earth—home—Terry Rourke looked at the fellows.

"Bedad," he muttered, "Oi haven't much hear-rt for annything, but I suppose we must remimber thot we're foiremen, and that there's a call ahead. Trot, ye useless spalpeens! Oi'll lead ye—the most useless av ye all!"

## CHAPTER X.

### UP THE LADDERS TO DESPAIR.

"If his head had been two inches forward of where it was the blow would have missed him. Had his head been two inches nearer Belmont at that instant, the blow would have killed him."

That was the doctor's opinion when he had looked Young Wide Awake over as he lay on the sofa in his mother's sitting-room.

The doctor had been hastily called on the way home.

After some minutes at the house the man of medicine had succeeded in bringing the young fireman to.

They wanted to put the lad to bed, but this Young Wide Awake stoutly refused to accept.

"I'll be all right in a little while," he muttered.

"You'll be better a good deal sooner if you'll go to bed and rest up," advised the doctor.

"Humph! I've had one resting spell lately," grunted the boy. "I might as well be out of the fire department if I'm going to take rests all the time."

"But who could have done such an awful thing?" came through Mrs. Halstead's pallid lips.

"Most likely it was all an accident," suggested the young fireman.

He did not want to alarm his mother by telling her about the enmity of Gamp and Evans.

"Accident?" murmured the doctor to himself. "Humph!"

Young Wide Awake restlessly pushed the blankets away from him and sat up.

"Don't try to do that, Dick," begged his mother.

"I believe I need exercise as much as anything," smiled the young fire captain.

His head ached fearfully, and he felt weak and dizzy.

Yet the doctor had assured him that there was no clot on the brain, and that the skull had escaped fracture by the narrowest possible margin.

"In that case," contended Young Wide Awake, "there's nothing the matter with me except a sore head."

"But you'll do well to rest two or three days," contended the doctor, as he went out.

Mrs. Halstead made her son as cosy as she could in a great arm-chair by a window.

"You won't attempt to answer fire calls until your head is better, will you?" begged his mother.

"Why, that would be a queer excuse, wouldn't it?" he smiled, through his pain. "A fireman misses a box be-



cause he has a headache! I remember now that the doctor who examined us for the fire department asked each of us if he was subject to headaches. That must have been what he had in view."

"I can't understand any one's attempt to kill you!" shuddered his mother.

"It doesn't look reasonable that any one would try to, does it?" smiled Young Wide Awake.

By the middle of the afternoon, finding that Dick appeared stronger, and that he was able to move about by himself, Mrs. Halstead hastened to her office for half an hour to look after something that was important.

Almost immediately after she had gone, Dick heard a step in the kitchen.

He rose, turning toward the door, suspiciously.

But the connecting door opened to admit Jason Sharp, Belmont's chief of police.

"Oh!" said Dick, with something like a sigh of relief, the color coming back to his face.

Jason Sharp eyed him keenly.

"So, Young Wide Awake, you were afraid it might be some one else, eh? That's just what I came to find out. Who is that some one else?"

The police chief stood sharply watching the young fire captain's face.

Jason Sharp was middle-aged, small, wiry, strong, in a pantherish way, and with the piercing eye of the eagle.

He was a born policeman—all policeman in fact.

In the discharge of his duties he knew no friends.

Fearless of man or devil, Sharp felt himself on duty in Belmont every hour of the twenty-four.

Several criminals had found it convenient to leave that part of the country, and all on account of Chief Sharp's fearless, tireless activities.

Sharp looked the boy over closely for some moments.

Then he asked, bluntly, directly:

"Who threw that stone?"

"I don't know," Young Wide Awake answered, simply.

"Of course you don't, for if you had seen any one with a stone in his hand you would have dodged."

"That's the case," nodded Young Wide Awake.

"But whom do you suspect?"

Dick hesitated. He did not want to accuse Gamp and Evans without knowing more against them.

Jason Sharp, once his suspicions were thoroughly aroused, was likely to act quickly.

Even with such worthless people as Gamp and Evans, liberty is sweet.

"What about Fred Parsons?" shot out the chief of police.

"Well, what about him?" repeated Young Wide Awake.

"Do you think he had any hand in the deed?"

"Not for an instant," returned Young Wide Awake, promptly.

"You consider him above such an act, do you?"

"I do—emphatically."

"Yet he is an enemy of yours."

"I suppose he doesn't like me any too well. But Fred Parsons is not a thug."

"Then you honestly don't suspect him?"

"I honestly don't."

"Whom do you suspect?"

The question was shot forward at point-blank range.

"Well, since you're pinning me down," smiled Young Wide Awake, "I will tell you all I know that may have a bearing on the case. But, mind you, I don't accuse any one, and I believe you would be making a great mistake, Mr. Sharp, to arrest any one on my suspicion, until you or I have found evidence to make the suspicion good."

"Go ahead," ordered Jason Sharp, relentlessly. "Name the party."

"There are two of them."

"Oh!"

"A few nights ago Terry Rourke and I found Sliney Gamp and Rack Evans, two hard characters from Norwich, across the river, annoying two young ladies. We pitched into them—the toughs, I mean, of course—and punneled them up some."

"And so incurred their enmity."

"I must have, for on my way home that same evening, Gamp and Evans laid for me with a paving-block, and nearly got me."

"Stone-throwing seems to be in their line," nodded the chief of police. "I guess I'll look them up."

"If they can prove that they were somewhere else, of course that would let them out," suggested Dick.

"Oh, toughs of that sort always can find some other toughs to come forward and swear that the accused were somewhere else," retorted the chief of police, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders. "So you think they may be the parties, and you have no idea whatever that Fred Parsons had any hand in the job?"

"I'm certain that Fred didn't," responded Young Wide Awake, earnestly.

"Humph!" grunted Chief Sharp to himself. "Perhaps I have a different notion, after witnessing that pow-wow between young Parsons and the thugs."

But to our hero all he said was:

"I'm going to find the guilty parties, whoever they are. I suppose you'll lay off for a few days, Young Wide Awake?"

Even the chief of police had adopted the name that so strikingly defined the young captain of Washington One.

"Lay off?" smiled Dick. "Well, I may keep out of school to-morrow, if my head troubles me much. I can make up school time later. But a fire? That's a different proposition that has to be handled at the moment or it's too late forever."

"Humph!" commented Jason Sharp. "Well, so long, Young Wide Awake, and at least go through the motions of taking care of yourself. You needn't go to the door. I can let myself out as I let myself in."

But Young Wide Awake smiled to himself as soon as the chief had gone.



"Jason Sharp came in thus unexpectedly to see if I would look alarmed. That was his detective way of judging whether I knew any enemy that I would fear while I'm in a weak state."

Mrs. Halstead came home soon after, but Dick told her nothing of the chief's visit.

"So many people stopped me to ask about you, my son," she informed him, "that I had to excuse myself rather abruptly in order to get home at all."

Dark was just coming on when there came a warning ring on the clapper upstairs.

Dick stepped to the hallway door, holding it open.

"Oh, you're not going?" cried his mother, in alarm.

"Wait!" he asked softly and listened.

"That's not our box," he said, quickly. "It's from Fullerton's factory, and Torrent One answers that on the first call."

"Oh, I'm so thankful!" sighed Mrs. Halstead.

"I don't want to worry you, mother, but I've got to go down to the fire house. A factory alarm is always likely to result in a second alarm."

"But you're not fit——"

"Oh, yes, I am, mother, if there happens to be any need of me. A fireman can't take care of himself in exactly the same way that an opera singer does, you know."

Mrs. Halstead shuddered a little, but helped him on with his coat, thinking how much the boy was like the dead father in his quiet determination to do his duty, no matter what happened.

Young Wide Awake left the house promptly. He felt stronger as he walked through the cold, crisp air.

He was still half a block from the fire house when another call began to sound on the town's fire alarm system.

He broke into a slow run, muttering:

"That's the second call. I thought there'd be one."

He was first of all at the house.

Within the next forty-five seconds eight boys had reported from Main Street.

Half a minute more swelled the number to eleven besides the young captain.

"We won't wait any longer, but run the machines out," decided Young Wide Awake. "We can get some help at Main Street."

In fact, more of their own crew joined on the run at the corner of Main Street.

And just behind them, as they wheeled around the corner into Main Street, came the sharp sound of Chief Pelton's buggy gong.

"Halstead!" shouted the chief, slowing up, "you're not attempting to answer this alarm, are you?"

"Why, yes, chief."

"Get into my buggy, then, anyway."

There were hands enough on the machines now, so that Young Wide Awake complied.

As they drove forward the chief gave him some further

details than Captain Halstead had heard before of the fire at Crawford.

The smaller stable had been dynamited, and a strong stream had been played upon the scattered timbers and hay.

There had not been much glory in that fire, but a lot of downright hard work.

"Didn't any of your fellows come down to see you afterward?" asked Chief Pelton, in surprise.

"Hal, Joe, and Terry called, but mother saw them at the door, and sent the other fellows word by them not to call."

"Whew! But that's a blaze!" exclaimed Chief Pelton, as they turned a corner and came in sight of the fire.

Flames were leaping from the upper portion of one wing of Fullerton's factory.

"I hope everyone is safe out of there," gritted the chief. "Captain, you'll have to do a watching part, I guess. You can stand by to boss the pumping of Washington One."

"That's not an order, is it, chief?" asked Young Wide Awake, in quick alarm.

"Why?"

"Because I'm in shape, and I want to do my full duty."

"Try it, then," said Chief Pelton, briefly, as he drew up sharply in the factory yard.

Torrent One was already there, and so was the hook and ladder.

Torrent was coupled with the hydrant, but waiting for a ladder.

The stream would be of use only aloft.

Chief Pelton leaped out at one side of the buggy, Young Wide Awake almost tumbling out at the other.

"Off with all your long ladders on the jump!" roared the chief.

Tom Scott's crew were working like beavers, aided by men from the factory.

"Never mind the property, chief!" called Mr. Fullerton, desperately, as he ran up. "There are some forty girls imprisoned in that top work-room, and the staircase is ablaze. Get them out!"

There was little need of the information, for at the windows, high above the greatest glare, appeared dozens of white, scared faces, while appealing shrieks came down to the firemen.

"We need streams and axes, as well as rescuers!" shouted Chief Pelton, as he moved away. "Halstead, get your stream and men up at the north end of the wing!"

Young Wide Awake sprang forward to direct the raising of a ladder where he wanted it.

By the time that this was done, Washington One was dashing into the factory yard, through the dividing crowd of factory employees.

In a jiffy Hal had the hose coupled on to the nearest hydrant.

The pumpers sprang to the bars of Washington One.

"Hal!" called Young Wide Awake, "you and I will rush the nozzle up. Terry, get six axmen to follow you. Joe,



bring up all who can be spared for the rescue work. Lively, now—as fast as you can follow each other up!”

The ladder was resting against the building, just out of reach of a window, for Young Wide Awake knew that if the frantic girls could get at the ladder some of them would try to flock down it so fast that there would probably be some loss of life in the panic.

But now he ordered the top of the ladder shifted to the window sill.

“No! no! Don’t come!” he bawled through the trumpet, as three or four girls tried to get upon the ladder at once. “Back! Wait until we reach you!”

The girls hesitated, but drew back when they saw the swarming rush of young firemen on the ladder.

Young Wide Awake and Hal Norton, bearing the nozzle between them, reached the sill and leaped into the factory room.

The fire was largely in the ceiling and the flooring beneath them, but already the room in which the girls were imprisoned was filling fast with smoke, while the still, hot air was well nigh suffocating.

“Panic is what you’ve got to fight here, Joe,” muttered Young Wide Awake, as Darrell followed them into the work-room.

## CHAPTER XI.

### “JUMP FOR YOUR LIVES!”

Swish!

The stream from Washington One was first at work.

But Torrent’s stream was only three or four seconds later.

Drenching floods of water poured along the floor, wetting everything, and tending to keep the flames from leaping through.

Young Wide Awake almost instantly abandoned the hose to one of the other fellows, while Hal followed suit an instant later.

They were needed in calming the panic.

Down at the further end of the room, where the flames had already burst through the flooring, Torrent diverted its stream, while Terry and his axmen jumped in to help.

“Let us get to the ladders! Don’t stop us!” shrieked one of the terrified girls at the head of a bunch who had crowded to the window through which the young Washingtons had come.

“Young ladies!” shouted Captain Halstead through his trumpet, “we don’t intend to stop you. But we want to send you down in orderly fashion, so that there won’t be loss of life. Only keep cool, or as cool as you can, and there won’t be a single mishap.

“That’s Young Wide Awake!” cried one girl. “Mind him! He knows what he’s about.”

“Now,” called Dick, “let only those come forward who are sure that they can climb down a ladder without help.”

“Oh, I couldn’t,” shuddered a girl, shrinking back. “I know I’d get dizzy and fall.”

“You’re just the one to wait, then,” said Young Wide Awake, coolly. “Wait until the speedier ones have gotten down, and then we’ll carry you.”

Hugh Davis, captain of Torrent One, was marshaling other girls into safe order down at the other end of the room.

“Now, then, forward—all who *know* that they can climb down a ladder,” called Dick.

Joe and one of his crew stood by the open window, helping the girls out on to the ladder.

It was slow work, for our hero would not allow more than three on the ladder at a time.

He was afraid that crowding would result in panic.

“Keep cool, young ladies!” he shouted to the waiting ones. “There is time enough for you all. We’ve got to stay and put out the fire after we get you down.”

Down at the other end of the room the sharp crashing of axes added to the din.

And Young Wide Awake was quick to realize that the smoke, even if not the fire, was gaining on them.

How slowly the girls went down that ladder!

Fright and excitement seemed to palsy them.

Yet Dick did not dare to try to hurry them, for fear of the panic that he was trying to provide against.

Four men employees had been caught in this burning trap.

But they stood gloomily back, for they knew that the firemen would not allow them on the ladders until the last of the girls had been saved.

But Dick, seeing that things were going well here, left the window to step through the big work-room.

As he passed the men, our hero espied a boy, seemingly about sixteen years old, but small, misshapen, and dragging himself along on a crutch.

“Dave Hapgood!” cried Young Wide Awake. “See here, you’re crippled. You should be among the first to get out. Wait! I’ll carry you and send someone down with you.”

But Dave shrank back against one of the benches.

“Don’t!” he begged.

“But we must get cripples like you out of danger, Dave!”

“Can’t cripples be men?” flashed back Dave, with spirit.

“That’s the talk!” glowed Dick. “But see here! We can’t leave you till the last, just the same. It wouldn’t be right.”

“Then I’ll be the first of the men to go down,” retorted Dave, stubbornly. “But I won’t stir out of here until all the women folks are safe below. Hurry on! You’re needed here.”

His heart beating a bit faster from this sight of the cripple’s grit and manliness, Dick bounded away down the room.

The floor was running deep with water, but still both nozzles poured it on.

“Torrent One!” came the hail from the ground.

“Torrent!” repeated a fireman from the window.

Hugh Davis, captain of Torrent, leaped to the window to answer.



"Torrent, take your men down to the floor below and get a stream at work there!" rang Chief Pelton's voice. "I'll send axmen to you."

Hastily Torrent's men were withdrawn.

"Young ladies, all up to the other end of the room!" cried Young Wide Awake.

Some seemed so dazed with fright that he had to push them along, speaking to them reassuringly.

Down below, just at the edge of the yard, Mr. Lester, Kitty, and Faith Vane stood looking up, for they knew that Young Wide Awake and his fire boys were up there in all the heat and peril.

They had heard of Dick's mishap, and had started to drive to his home to inquire after him, when the alarm sounded.

Mr. Lester, being a silent partner of Fullerton's, and having a good many thousands invested in the factory, had changed his direction and driven straight to the scene of the fire.

Our hero, intent only on his work, had not seen them, and did not know that they were there.

All of the girls who could take care of themselves on the ladders had now been gotten down.

There remained eight, who feared to go down by themselves.

Young Wide Awake was right on the spot at this instant.

"Joe," directed the young captain, handing one of the scared girls forward, "take this young lady down. Make fair speed, for we can have only two burdened men on a ladder at once."

Another of Joe's rescue party followed with a second girl in his arms.

"Halstead!" rang the chief's voice.

Dick jumped to another window.

"Chief!" he answered through the trumpet.

"Get everyone out on the jump now! That floor will soon cave!"

Joe and his comrades were down.

"Two more of you on the ladder!" ordered Dick, himself handing the frightened girls forward to the rescuers. "Don't any of you fellows come back, either!"

From the way the smoke and steam rolled below he knew that the ladder itself would soon be in danger from the flames.

So he stood there steadfastly at the window, hurrying the girls down as fast as he could.

They were all down, in safety, at last.

"Now, you men employees!" he called, turning to the frightened four, who were pressing forward.

It was time to move quickly, for Torrent One had just been ordered from the floor below.

One after another these men employees sprang on to the ladder and scuttled down.

"Washington One—all down!" bellowed Chief Pelton's voice.

Dick bellowed the order along the work-room.

Back came the nozzle-men, and back came Terry's tired, dripping crew.

"Hustle! It's about our last minute to get down!" breathed Young Wide Awake, sternly.

First, the hose was thrown to the ground.

"Now, you fellows shinny down as fast as you can!" ordered Young Wide Awake, crisply. "Seconds stand for lives now!"

Three of them passed, calling up that the ladder was hot.

The third was Ted Lester, who had worked with might and main in Terry's axe crew.

A fourth, on his way down, was driven back by a jet of flame that nipped at the ladder and caught.

"No more on the ladder!" yelled Chief Pelton. "Wait!"

In a jiffy the ladder was drawn down and the starting blaze on its rungs stamped out.

"Bring out the life net!" came the fire chief's next ringing order.

Firemen and spectators alike rushed it forward.

"All ready!" quivered up the chief's voice. "Steady now! Jump for your lives!"

"One at a time," panted Young Wide Awake, who yet had eleven of his crew up there with him.

"You first, then," begged Hal, pushing our hero forward. "You're the weakest to-day."

"The captain is always the last to leave the ship," Young Wide Awake retorted, doughtily; "but we've got to do this by discipline. Each fellow jump as I call his name."

Slam Bangs went first. He almost broke the net, so swift was his downward course.

Then another fellow, standing on the sill, made the leap; and then another. When the net is strong, and well held, it is usually the coolness and intelligence of the jumper that decides whether he is to be killed or maimed, or whether he leaps to safety.

"You next, Terry!" called Young Wide Awake, finally.

"Shure, not until afther you!" retorted the Irish lad.

"No back talk! Joe!"

Darrell, realizing how much his captain was in earnest, jumped, and safely.

Then Hal followed.

"Now, Terry!"

"Shure——"

"I sha'n't jump until you're down there!"

Without another word of objection young Rourke jumped.

"Now, Young Wide Awake! Quick! For your life!" came a roar from below.

Dick stood on the sill, framed in all the smoke and the casting shadows and flames.

A choking cheer arose, and above it all the fire chief's bellow:

"Jump! It's the last second's chance that you've got!"

But suddenly a remembrance rushed through Young Wide Awake's brain.



Dave Hapgood, the cripple! That misshapen little man was not among the rescued.

"Wait!" bawled down the young fireman. "One more life to save!"

He jumped down from the sill, running to where he had last seen Dave Hapgood.

There lay the cripple, huddled on the floor, overcome by the fumes.

In a twinkling Young Wide Awake snatched up the light little fellow in his arms.

He started for the window, but a weak spot in the half-charred floor gave way under them.

That started a whole section of flooring as Young Wide Awake and his human burden fell through into the fiery chaos below.

Those outside heard the crash, and shouted frantically: "Dick!"

"Halstead!"

"Young Wide Awake!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### CONCLUSION.

As he fell, Captain Dick Halstead did not let go his grip on unconscious, crippled Dave.

Their downward course just cleared a steel shafting, over which, had either struck it, a broken back might have resulted.

Plunge! Souse! Rescuer and burden fell together into a vat of water.

For an instant their heads disappeared below the surface.

They would have been buried under the burning ruins of the floor had not the shafting caught the flying timbers and parted them.

As it was, when Young Wide Awake's face showed above the surface of the water in the vat he saw blazing embers strewn all around him.

He crawled out of the vat, holding his breath, for here, in sixty seconds, the smoke would strangle the owner of the strongest pair of lungs.

Only one path could he see that was not too hot to tread over.

It led to a closed window.

A prayer in his heart, Young Wide Awake darted quickly to that window.

Snatching up a heavy mallet as he laid Dave Hapgood down for an instant, Dick smashed lustily at the window frame.

The crashing of the glass attracted attention his way.

As the last of the sash flew outward, Dick raised Dave Hapgood in his arms and leaped to the sill, shouting:

"Here, with the net!"

He stood there calmly, though choking from the smoke that rolled around him, for the few seconds that it took those below to get the net ready.

Then Young Wide Awake jumped. He shot down, landing in the net, rolling over on his side, but holding crippled Dave uppermost.

There were wild cheers when Hapgood was rushed over by the fence to be revived, while Young Wide Awake stepped out of the net and walked weakly away.

"Captain Halstead, no more duty from you to-night!" shouted Chief Pelton. "You've done ten men's duty already."

That was an order, flat and final, that could not be disobeyed.

"Halstead," called John Lester, stepping forward, "my carriage is here. Come over and sit in it. When the fire is over we'll take you home. Lean on my arm."

Truth to tell, after all that hard work and excitement, capped by the fall through the flooring and the subsequent leap to the net, Young Wide Awake was glad enough to lean on a friendly arm.

He was helped back to the carriage, where Kitty and Faith were seated.

"It's kind of you to consent to take a little rest," said Kitty, almost grimly, as she pressed his hand and made room for him beside her.

"Are they going to save the rest of the factory?" asked Young Wide Awake.

"Yes, and the foundation structure of the wing, too," replied Mr. Lester. "Do you see where they're driving the streams now?"

Fred Parsons, who had just arrived, caught sight of the Lester carriage, and hastened over.

He drew back, however, when he saw Young Wide Awake seated therein.

As the young man drew back, Jason Sharp touched him on the arm.

"Parsons," announced the chief of police, "I'd like a word with you."

Fred followed the chief, a chilling suspicion creeping into his mind.

"What do you know about that rock that hit Young Wide Awake on the head this morning?" demanded the police chief, bluntly.

"N-n-nothing," stammered the young man.

"Then why are you so upset at the question?"

"Because I know what you think. You saw me talking to those two toughs the other day. I'll tell you the truth, Mr. Sharp. They asked me what I'd pay to have Dick Halstead laid up. I declined to have anything to do with them."

"I shall have to excuse myself, just for a moment," murmured Dick, and left the carriage, going over to where Mr. Sharp and young Parsons stood.

Our hero was just in time to hear Fred's statement.

"Chief," broke in Young Wide Awake, "I told you I did not suspect Fred Parsons."

"But I may, may I not?" queried Jason Sharp, bluntly. "It happens, Halstead, that I saw this young man, the



other day, talking with the pair who you think may have been behind your trouble this morning."

"They did propose such a thing to me, and I refused their offer," contended Parsons, whose face was very white.

"I believe that," acknowledged Dick. "I don't believe Parsons would mix up in anything as dirty as that."

"Excuse me," interrupted one of the lately rescued girls, stepping forward. "But are you talking about that time, the other day, Mr. Sharp, when this young man was talking with two toughs around a corner from Main Street?"

"Yes," admitted the chief, looking at the girl, sharply. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Why, I live in the flat right over where the young man was talking to those rough-looking fellows the other day. I was home with a headache, and went to an open window. I heard this young man refuse to have anything to do with them. That was when I saw you going by on the other side of the street, too, Mr. Sharp."

"It seems clear enough, Chief," urged Young Wide Awake. "The case simmers down to this: Camp and Evans must be the rascals who laid me up this morning, but we can't prove it that they really did it. In any case, Fred Parsons can't be honestly suspected of putting them up to it."

"Of course I didn't," protested the scared young fellow.

"And I never suspected that you did," replied Dick, warmly. "Here's my hand on it."

Fred started, then took Young Wide Awake's hand, gingerly, while Sharp, after taking the girl's name and address, moved away.

"I'm sorry, even, that you should dislike me," went on Dick Halstead. "I never had any feeling of enmity toward you."

Then, seeing that his enemy looked embarrassed, Young Wide Awake turned and stepped back to the Lester carriage.

"What was the matter?" Kitty asked.

Dick thought the simplest way was to tell the whole truth.

"It is like you to go out of your way to spare him," murmured Kitty. "I wonder if Fred would do as much for you?"

It may be mentioned, in passing, that Chief Sharp cornered Gamp and Evans, and made them admit the talk with Parsons.

But they were cunning enough to stoutly deny that they really threw the stone from the Crawford bridge.

Thus, though really guilty, they escaped the punishment of the law.

Such characters, however, do not remain long at liberty.

Always hounded by the police, they are always sure, sooner or later, to be run behind the bars.

The main buildings of Fullerton's factory were saved on that cold night of hard, desperate work.

Even the foundation part of the wing was saved so that it could be built upon again.

By the time that Young Wide Awake realized what a

grimy, sooty, smoke-smelling young man he was, he wanted to leave the Lester carriage.

But none of the other occupants would hear of that.

So Fred Parsons, who lingered enviously, had, at last, the heart-stab of seeing Dick Halstead ride away beside Kitty Lester.

Yet, before the carriage went, Mr. Fullerton came over to speak to Mr. Lester.

When he saw Young Wide Awake there, the factory owner held out a hearty hand.

"Captain Halstead, I want to thank you above every one to-night," declared Mr. Fullerton, warmly. "I understand that it was you who led the rescue work and made sure that all my endangered employes got off with their lives, even to poor, manly little cripple, Dave Hapgood. Dave, by the way, has come to, and will be all right. You may be glad to know that Dave won't get in such a fix again. After this he will be on the ground floor, in my office. He is to have a better position. You have saved a great many lives to-night, Young Wide Awake."

"Where do the other fellows of Washington One come in?" queried Dick, smiling.

"I'm thanking them through you," replied Mr. Fullerton. "Wait a moment."

Then, raising his voice, he shouted:

"Neighbors and fellow-townsmen, what do you think of Young Wide Awake?"

"The best ever!" came a quick voice.

"And the Belmont fire boys of Washington One?" shouted Mr. Fullerton.

"The real thing!" came back another voice, and more cheers.

Belmont's fire boys had come to stay.

They were to be one of the town's institutions after that.

All that was plain from the joyous tumult in the air just as the Lester carriage left the factory yard.

### THE END.

The further and greater fortunes of Young Wide Awake and his Belmont fire boys will be followed in "YOUNG WIDE AWAKE'S BIGGEST BLAZE; OR, SAVING A BURNING CITY," which will be published complete in No. 42 of "The Wide Awake Weekly," out next week! No more thrilling or true-to-the-life firemen's story has ever been written. In this splendid story the work of firemen is seen at its best, when they are brought into sharp competition against the fire departments of other towns. Thrilling, humorous, pathetic and rollicking situations abound in this great, new firemen's story!

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